

Life of Jacob Boehme

1575 birth year according to his personal entry in “Aurora” on the titelpage in 1612, his age being 37 years. Jacob Boehme is the fourth of five children and the third of four sons of the free farmer Jacob Boehme in Altseidenberg, who, like his father Ambrosius was a court juror, as well as a church elder.

1581 begin of a good education, presumably at the town school of Seidenberg.

1589 following is a three-year apprenticeship as a shoemaker.

1592 two years of travel in Upper Lusatia, in Lower Saxony and Bohemia. In the course of this time, he becomes acquainted with Caspar Schwenckfeld’s reformation teachings, country preachers and Bohemian brethren.

1594 after testimonials of his friends the Goerlitz doctor Tobias Kober and his first biographer Abraham von Franckenberg, the young shoemaker returns to Goerlitz, however not yet as a “master and groom”, as some have meant to say.

1599 Jacob Boehme is shoemaker master and registers himself as citizen of Goerlitz for 4 schick groschen. The burgher rights of a single man require him to marry within 6 months and to attain ownership of a house.

On the same day, he purchases 44 cobbler benches at the lower market for 240 Goerlitz marks from the brother-in-law of his future mother-in-law.

1599 May 10th: Marriage to Katharina Kuntschman, daughter of a wealthy butcher master.

1599 August 19th: Balthasar Walther, doctor and alchemist, is visiting the scholarly mayor of Goerlitz, Bartholomaeus Scultetus. Boehme is introduced to Walther.

1599 August 21st: Jacob Boehme purchases his first residence in the “Neustaedtel” district in the Ravenstreet for 300 marks, which has been marked since 1924 with a plaque, formerly the Prague Street 12 on the east shore of the river Neisse.

Burgher rights, cobbler benches, residence and furnishings cost about 600 Goerlitz marks, which are to be paid off. This presupposes business sense and middle prosperity. This sum is equivalent to the sales price of his parental property with about 30 hectare of land.

1600 12 years later: Jacob Boehme reports about his first “Erkenntnisprozess” – process to self-consciousness.

1600 January 29th: Baptism of his oldest son Jacob, entry in the baptismal register of the central parish church St. Peter and Paul in Goerlitz.

1602 January 8th: Baptism of his second son Michael.

1603 September 11th: Baptism of his third son Tobias.

1604 July 24th: Jacob Boehme is denounced and summoned before the council, because he supposedly, aside from his own personal use, tanned for other shoemakers and through these actions, harmed the business of other tanners.

Record of the Council: “The shoemaker Jacob Boehme is let off with the condition, that he may not tan for other shoemakers and also should put up half of the fine of 6 schillings (72 Groschen) within 14 days.”

1605 November 19th: Jacob Boehme takes out a credit in the total of 36 marks and uses his cobbler bench as a deposit.

1606 the senior pastor Martin Moller dies in dispute with 6 theologian faculties, who suspect him to be a secret Calvinist. His successor is Gregor Richter.

1606 April 29th: Record of the council: “Jacob Kissling and Jacob Boehme have been sentenced to jail, because they called the white tanner Matz Roehricht a knave. Roehricht is also locked up “on account of unreasonable sales”.

1606 May 2nd: All three are set free. It remains uncertain, whether the shoemaker J. Boehme or his namesake, a red tanner from the Lothar street, was prosecuted.

February 2nd: Boehme’s father meets an inheritance settlement after the death of his wife Ursula, because he intends a second marriage.

1607 April 26th – May 1st: The famous court astronomer of Emperor Rudolph II, Johannes Kepler, is in Goerlitz and visits Bartholomaeus Scultetus.

1608 Spring: The sons Jacob and Michael show up as participants at the Gregorius School Festival.

June 21st: Jacob Boehme is paid the maternal inheritance. He sells his house on the 26th of July, but resides there as renter.

Son Tobias attends the Goerlitz Middle School, the lower four classes of the Goerlitzer High School. He is regarded a child of wealthy parents.

Jacob Boehme takes over the guardianship for his unmarried sister-in-law Rosine Kuntschman.

1610 June 22nd: Jacob Boehme purchases two houses built on the property of Valentin Lange on the east end of the Neisse bridge “between the gates behind the hospital smithy” for 375

Goerlitz marks. He pays for both buildings “Geschoß and Herd” taxes of 27 Groschen and 6 pennies half-yearly.

During this time, Jacob Boehme experiences his second process to self-consciousness when a pewter cup reflects the sun.

1611 Jacob Boehme sells the smaller of the two houses, paying from this time on taxes of only 15 Groschen, 2 pennies.

1611 September 4th: Entry of his youngest son Elias in the baptismal registry of the Church of St. Peter and Paul.

1611 November 13th: Renewed credit of 50 Goerlitz marks for one year including a mortgage on his house.

1612 January 27th – June 3rd: Jacob Boehme writes his first work “Morgen Röte im auffgang” (“Morning Glow, Ascending”), later latin “Aurora”, after 12 years of reflections and the study of “many higher master works about sciences, astronomy and philosophy”. This universal work already contains the essential focal points of Boehme’s later works, remains however unfinished. Karl Ender von Sercha makes a copy, which becomes a model for further distribution of this work through copies.

1612 March 12th: Jacob Boehme sells his cobbler benches and ends his market business, presumably to devote himself to trade and his literary works.

Boehme purchases together with his guildsman Hans Buerger 332 beef skins in Löweberg, which are refused to the shoemakers by complaints of the tanners on May 19th, but then returned to the shoemakers after their countercharges on the 25th of August. Jacob Boehme and five other shoemaker masters gain 40 leathers, who are, amongst 11 buyers, the winners.

1613 July 26th: The city council of Goerlitz is aware of the circulation of the “Aurora” copies. To avoid trouble with the orthodox Lutheran Gregor Richter and – as already in 1592 and 1602 – the administrator of the Upper- and Lower Lusatia, ruled under catholic clerical hands in the catholic chapter of Bautzen, the mayor Bartholomaeus Scultetus summons Boehme to the town hall for questioning, places him under arrest for awhile, until the original documents are confiscated and then releases him with the warning to refrain from such things in the future.

1613 July 28th: Gregor Richter, the strict orthodox Lutheran senior pastor, sees it as his responsibility, to warn his parish of St. Peter and Paul of false prophets in his Sunday sermons.

1613 July 30th: Gregor Richter is against the mild sentence of the mayor. He summons Jacob Boehme in front of the ministry, an assembly of Goerlitz clergymen and questions him about his belief. He is issued a literary ban in all things, which concern only the church.

1613 because the guilds-controlled leather trade remains controversial between tanners and shoemakers, Boehme concentrates on the country trade, to which presumably Karl Ender von Sercha and other squires from the landed gentry cleared the paths, because the aristocrats had founded their own country trade. Boehme and his wife Katharina take advantage of the Goerlitz textile business, by acting against the ban on black market trade with thread, issued by the Goerlitz Council in 1606. This is spun in the country as rural second occupation and sold inexpensively to canvas weavers in Goerlitz.

1616 October 8th: Records of the council: Katharina Boehme and 17 other Goerlitzer women are summoned because of black market activities with yarn, but due to insignificance of the process, go unpunished. However, the council seems to have been investigating the husbands.

1616 October 22nd: Records of the council: Jacob Boehme is sentenced to a fine of 10 Taler due to his illegal thread trade. How he helps himself and family in the following years is unknown. Later, one hears from his letters, that he conducts a glove trade, which he transports over far stretches, travelling by foot to Silesia and Bohemia. During these travels, he makes acquaintances with many, who have withdrawn themselves from the authoritative declarations of religious forces and become pen-pals in 1618.

1618 the begin of the 30-year war. The roads through the mountains to Bohemia become dangerous. Boehme writes to Balthasar Walther before the outbreak of the war, stating he is burdened with many worldly transactions. In the same year, his father dies.

1619 Emperor Matthias dies. In accordance with the intentions of the protestant state of Bohemia, the Bohemian throne is granted to the calvinist Elector Friedrich V from Rheinland. Jacob Boehme has connected with a delegation of the Upper Lusatian aristocrats and in Prague is the witness of the entry of Friedrich from Rheinland as King of Bohemia.

1619 December 20th: All reluctants, including the Landvogt Carl Hanibal von Dohna and the Dean of the Bautzen Cathedral Chapter, Lutherans as well as Catholics, are forced to take the oath of loyalty to Friedrich from Rheinland, as the King of Bohemia.

1620 November 8th: The battle at Weißen Berge forces Friedrich from Rheinland and his troops to withdraw back to Silesia from the imperial violence of Fredinand II.

The Emperor gains the Elector of Saxony Johann Georg I on his side in Upper Lusatia and in Silesia the Calvinists, meaning to destroy the military power of Friedrich from Rheinland.

1620 September: Elector Johann Georg invades the defensive Upper Lusatia, conquers Bautzen and has the city be burned down. This strike is enough to conquer and occupy the Upper- and Lower Lusatian “kursaechsisch” protestant power. Silesia is not attacked by Saxony.

The experiences and events of 1618/1619 cause Jacob Boehme to consider the literary ban from Gregor Richter invalid. He refers to his God-given talent and the warnings of his noble patrons, who carry his fate.

Boehme's biography becomes clear as of 1618 through his "theosophic epistles", to a large degree due to the close succession of his writings.

1619 Beginning of January until the middle of October: "Beschreibung der drei Prinzipien göttlichen Wesens" (*Description of the Three Principles of the Divine Essence*).

1619 second half of the year until

1620 probably completed in the Spring: "Vom dreifachen Leben des Menschen" (*Of the Threefold Life of Man*).

1620 May 8th: Completed "Vom irdischen und himmlischen Mysterium" (*Of the Earthly and Heavenly Mystery*) and around May: "Eine kurze Erklarung von sechs mystischen Punkten" (*A Short Explanation of Six Mystical Points*).

1620 Spring to August 3rd: "Vierzig Fragen von der Seele" (*Forty Questions Concerning the Soul*) – later appendix, „Das umgewandte Auge" (*The Eye turned back*).

1620 end of May until Autumn: "Von der Menschwerdung Jesu Christi" (*Of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ*), a treatise in three parts.

1620 August 14th to November 18th: "Unterricht von den letzten Zeiten" (*Instruction about the Last Times*), two parts (8th and 11th theosophic epistle to Paul Kaym).

The begin of discussions with counterargumentors.

1620 September 9th to October 18th: Boehme falls ill "because of evil soldiers".

1620 from the year's end until

1621 May 7th: "Erste Schutzschrift gegen Balthasar Tilke" (*First Apology to Balthasar Tilke*).

1621 March: Consolationscript "Von vier Complexionen" (*Of the Four Complexions*).

1621 April 18th: Completed "Bedenken über Esaias Stiefels Buechlein" (*Scruples about the booklet of Esaias Stiefel*).

1621 July 3rd: Completed "Zweite Schutzschrift gegen Balthasar Tilke" (*Second Apology to Balthasar Tilke*).

1621 in the second half of the year started and

1622 February 2nd: Completed "De Signatura Rerum".

1622 April 26th: Completed “Apologia, betreffend die Vollkommenheit des Menschen. Vom Irrtum der Sekten Esaias Stiefels und Ezechiel Meths” (*Of the Error of the sects of Esaias Stiefel and Ezechiel Meth*)

1622 June 1st: Completed “Von wahrer Buße” (*Of True Repentance*).

1622 June 24th: Completed “Von der neuen Wiedergeburt” (*Of the New Regeneration*).

1622 June – July: “Von der wahren Gelassenheit” (*Of True Resignation*).

1622 probably in Summer “Vom übersinnlichen Leben” – “Gespraech eines Meisters und Jüngers” (*A Dialogue Between a Master and a Scholar*).

1622 probably stopped in September “Von goettlicher Beschaulichkeit” (*Of Divine Contemplation*).

1622 beginning in September up to

1623 September 11th: Completed “Mysterium Magnum – Erklaerung über das erste Buch Mosis” (*Exposition of the First Book of Moses*).

1623 Begin of January until February 8th: “Von der Gnadenwahl” (*Of the Election of Grace*).

1623 February 9th: “De Poenitentia”.

1623 November – December: “Von Christi Testamenten” (*Of Christ’s Sacraments*), first version with two small scriptures:

“Von der heiligen Taufe” (*Baptism*) and

“Von dem heiligen Abendmahl” (*Supper*).

1623 December 27th: “Tafel der drei Prinzipien” (*Table of the Three Principles*), older version

1624 Jacob Boehme returns to Goerlitz and completes on February 25th “An eine hungrige und durstige Seele – Gespraech einer erleuchteten und unerleuchteten Seele” (*A Dialogue Between a Soul Hungry and Thirsty and a Soul Enlightened*).

1624 at the begin of the year, Boehmes’s writings “Von wahrer Buße” (*Of True Repentance*) and “Von wahrer Gelassenheit” (*Of True Resignation*) appear in Johann Rambau’s “Offizin” in Goerlitz, which Jacob Boehme already informs about on December 27th in the 49th theosophic epistle: “will come from the press in several days”.

In order to cover up the inconsistency of Boehme's statements to the Council of Goerlitz, this part of the 49th theosophic epistle has been deleted by Boehme publishers since 1682, even though it exists in the setting copy. (University Library Wroclaw). Not until recently was this deletion found as "new discovery" in the letter's appendix.

The order for printing was given by Hans Sigismund von Schweinichen, to whom Jacob Boehme fled in January/February 1624. The printing was approved by the Duke of Liegnitz without determining the place of printing. In Goerlitz, religious prints were subject to censorship by Gregor Richter, who turns to his fellow clergyman Frisius in Liegnitz and obtains a letter of complaint to the municipal authorities of Goerlitz: "A citizen of Goerlitz poisons his community in Liegnitz".

1624 beginning of March: Boehme is investigated as an author, proven the violation of the literary ban and the council's warnings, so that Richter goes into prosecution at the municipal authorities of Goerlitz as Lord of the Manor. In view of the circumstances in this hearing that Goerlitz is occupied "kursaechsisch" militarily, the Emperor, as King of Bohemia, is still the upper Lord of the Manor of Upper Lusatia.

1624 March 7th: Gregor Richter writes the first part of his "Judicium Gregorii Richteri" in latin, threatening the city of Goerlitz: "woe betide the place, where such blasphemy is spread out with impunity".

1624 March 23rd: The local council decides "because of diverse complaints and on account of the harmful theories" to examine Jacob Boehme and coerces him to leave the city.

1624 March 24th: Gregor Richter personally attacks Boehme in his sermons, calling him a "heretic, a dreamer and a scoundrel".

1624 March 25th: Jacob Boehme reports to Karl Ender von Sercha (52nd theosophic epistle, 2) about his forthcoming examination.

1624 March 26th: Examination of Jacob Boehme at the council meeting. To avoid a hearing and scandal, the questioning is limited to only 2 questions: Are you Jacob Boehme, the writer of both of the pamphlets? Answer: Yes. Did you, Jacob Boehme, arrange the printing? Answer: No, a silesian aristocrat (Hans Sigismund von Schweinichen) has done this. Resolution: Report to the Elector.

It was mentioned on the side to Boehme, from a well-meaning councilman, that he should leave Goerlitz for awhile "in order to avoid trouble". (53rd theosophic epistle, 5 15). The expulsion out of Goerlitz is actually stated in the protocol, "he would like to get out of town for some time", but lessened through Boehme's comment, he has friends who would take him in, with which the forced expulsion does not occur.

1624 March 27th: Furious about the mild actions taken by the municipal authorities and the outcome of the hearing, Gregor Richter writes the second and third part of his "Judicium", which personally attack Boehme in the form of mockery and insults.

The “Judicium Gregorii Richteri” is printed in Rambau in latin and structured as a humanistic Pasquill (defamatory piece of writing) for the amusement of the educated.

After Richter’s Pasquill is publicized, the municipal authorities decide to revoke the decision from March 26th (announcement of the events to the Elector). A religious political scandal was avoided!

1624 April 3rd: Jacob Boehme completes his “responsibility to the council of Goerlitz”. The council dismiss it, as well as Richter’s “Judicium”, which remains unnoticed.

1624 April 10th: Completed “Schutzrede gegen Gregor Richter” (*The Defense Speech against Gregor Richter*) with help from educated friends, mentioned already in the 53rd theosophic epistle from April 3rd and the 54th theosophic epistle from April 6th.

1624 March – April: “Schlüssel der vornehmsten Punkte – Clavis” (*Key of the Main Important Points*).

1624 mid-May through mid-June: “Vom heiligen Gebet” (*Prayer Booklet for all Days of the Week*). Unfinished , drawn up in Dresden by the personal physician and court alchemist Benedikt Hinkelmann.

Through a secret legation, Boehme already knew before the hearing that the lower silesian aristocrats would provide refuge at the Saxonian Court. Upper Lusatian friends support these intentions and the municipal authorities of Goerlitz are pleased, that they won’t have any trouble with Boehme for awhile.

Jacob Boehme takes in the abuse done to him as a passion and remains patiently in Goerlitz, while he is “totally faced with self-righteous nuisances,...so much Satan is over me and grows angry over my printed booklet and rages so much in the upper self-righteous..... my soul is not saddened, but holds in high regards....this is all for the triumph of Christ....you will all hear wonderous things, for the time is born, from which a face spoke to me three years ago, to be exact, the Reformation”.

(“General reformation of the whole world” was in 1614 the title of one the main writings of the “Rosenkreuzer”, who appointed themselves to alchemie, astrology und natural philosophy and found followers in the humanistic circle in Goerlitz, amongst them Caspar Donau, 1608 – 1615 grammar school rector.)

1624 May 9th: Jacob Boehme, with Upper Lusatian companions, goes over to Zittau, where the town doctor Melchoir persuades him to travel to Dresden, where he is put up in the castle of personal physician and court alchemist Benedikt Hinkelmann. He feels honored and more closer to his goal to achieve a better Christianity (reformation of the Reformation). The electoral and imperial Councillor Joachim von Loss welcomes him to the palace Pillnitz. The house marshal and the court preacher pay him courtesy visits. He finds documents in the bookstores of Dresden, that confirm him in his reformation intentions. He describes his impressions in many letters to Tobias Kober. The controversial Goerlitz printings are read at

court, presumably also a copy of the “Aurora”, that Jacob Boehme borrows on demand from his wife Katharina.

After the realisation that Jacob Boehme is no threat to religion and the country and that neither alchemist nor goldmaker, also not heretic nor preacher is a new religion, Boehme is sent back home to Goerlitz, around the middle of July.

1624 August 13th: Gregor Richter dies.

1624 Jacob Boehme and his wife are forced once again to undertake the difficult travels as pedlars.

1624 October: Jacob Boehme starts his last, unfinished remaining document “Betrachtungen goettlicher Offenbarung – 177 theosophische Fragen” (*177 theosophic questions*).

While his wife stays in Dresden on commercial travels, Jacob Boehme returns ill to Goerlitz after business travels in Silesia.

1624 during the night of the 16th to the 17th of November Jacob Boehme dies.

His friend and doctor Tobias Kober reports to Hans Sigismund von Schweinichen – During Boehme’s illness, Kober discussed issues with his colleague Melchoir Bernt from Zittau, summoned the jurist and author of Boehme’s original writings Johannes Rothe for nursing and the preacher Elias Dietrich was called upon to hear Boehme’s confession and grant absolution.

However, there is no peace with the church, because Richter’s successor Nikolaus Thomas rejects to conduct the funeral sermon and passes it on to Elias Dietrich.

At the widow’s instructions, Kober arranges for the Goerlitz doctor Michael Kurz (Curtius) to request a decision from the council on behalf of the funeral. Coincidentally, the Landvogt is in Goerlitz and he is the decisive factor: a heretic must also be entitled to a Christian funeral. After that, Elias Dietrich demands written orders to conduct the funeral sermon from the municipal authorities, in order to keep his conscience clear as a clergyman, however personally changes the sermon topic given from Kober.

1624 November 18: Jacob Boehme’s funeral with participation from shoemaker- and tanner guild, the sound of the knell and “with a great fuss made by the people” (Kober). Boehme is denied the symbolically decorated cross-shaped gravestone donated by his aristocrat friends, which is removed a few days later. Pictorial portrayal of the gravestone shows up in the work edition from J. G. Gichtel 1682 in contemporary style, as well as an imaginative reconstruction.

The existence of sole prints published during Boehme’s life of two of his small scriptures is first proven in the year 2000 in two copies. It is united with further Boehme documents as “the way to christ”, the most read Boehme text.

Finally, in 1814, the founder of the Upper Lusatian Society of Sciences Karl Gottlob von Anton arranges the erection of a memorial, which remains still lie behind the great foundling and was finally erected in 1869 as a monolithic memorial at Boehme's grave from this society.

With kind permission from:

Ernst-Heinz Lemper: Jacob Böhme. Lebenswege (1575-1624)

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