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*Leeds Studies in English*  
School of English  
University of Leeds  
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## Lucerne Revisited: Facts and Questions

John E. Tailby

There can be no more appropriate place than in Peter's *Festschrift* to write again in English about the staging of the 1583 passion play performance in Lucerne. By comparing details from various documents from the Lucerne archives more can now be said with reasonable certainty about the layout of the square than had been established when we published our collaborative transcription and translation of the stage-plans published in *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages*, edited by Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby (Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 1983); hereafter M&T.

Fortunately the Lucerne *Zentralbibliothek* contains, besides the actual stage plans, both the land registry plan (*Katasterplan*) of the city for 1790, which shows that the properties around the square have the same dimensions as today, and the well-known plan of the town by Martin Martini dating from 1597, which shows the positions of the individual doorways to the properties on the north side of the square. We also know that the Lucerne carpenters such as Uolrich Hardmeier at this time used a foot 30.38 cms long. Equipped with this information it is then possible to put in the dimensions gleaned from Town Clerk and Director Cysat's contemporary documentation on the modern 1:250 plan of the square, taking 'one foot' to equal 1.2mm, '5 feet' 6.0mm; The results can be seen on p. 357; for the purposes of publication this plan was then further reduced.

Several of the properties surrounding the square are denoted by the name of the owners, e.g. Knab, v.Wyl, Pfyffer, Helmlin, Allmender, Krämer. Others are the houses of guilds: the Tanners, the Shoemakers, the Butchers. Some have their own name: [at the sign of] the Black Horse, the Pike, the Rose (which was Cysat's house) and the Sun, at the top of the square, most famous in the documentation because it also appears on Cysat's stage plans. The Sonnebergs' house is also referred to as the New Apothecary's; the remaining property is the Old Courthouse (*altes Gerichthus*), under which goes the passageway known as *Brotschol*, opening on to the square with

a wider arch. There is also a passageway leading under the Butchers' hall, called *passage* or *gang* in the documentation, and a narrow unnamed gap between the Pfyffer and v.Wyl houses on the south side, which leads down to the *Fischer Stat*.

One surviving document gives dimensions for each of the stalls which surround the acting area. This is the record made by the Master of Works (*Werkmeister*), Uolrich Hardmeyer on the instructions of Renward Cysat the day after the 1583 performance. The German text of Hardmeyer's *Division* is to be found on pp. 165-70 of the original English-language version of M. B. Evans's book *The Passion Play of Lucerne* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1943), and my English translation is on pp. 81-87 in M&T. As we were taught in primary school, in each case the shorter dimension is called 'breadth' and the longer dimension 'length'. Nevertheless, all those along the north side of the Lucerne *Weinmarkt* which are 9 feet or 9 feet 6 inches refer to the distance away from the buildings towards the centre of the square. That this is the correct interpretation can be demonstrated by adding together the remaining dimensions for each stall, which add up to 93 feet. As the plan on p. 357 shows, both this overall 93 feet and the individual details concerning this north side fit convincingly. Hardmeyer's *Division* relates that this series of stalls is to begin one foot uphill from the doorway of the Knab house and that the stall of Moses reaches as far uphill as the archway of the *Brotschol*. Not only these two ends but also several intervening points fit exactly. The Apothecary's stall is to be exactly in front of the door of Town Clerk Cysat's house; the stall of Mary the Mother of Christ is to be in front of Town Clerk Cysat's house; Zaccheus's stall is to be uphill from the stall of Mary, precisely in front of the Old Courthouse. The stall of Annas is to reach just up to Town Clerk Cysat's house; and the upper end of Herod's stall is 5 feet downhill from the door of the Sonneberg house/ New Apothecary's.<sup>1</sup>

The stalls of Moses and Saul appear to be triangular. For each only one dimension is given. The *Division* emphasises the need to keep a space 9 feet wide to give access to Hell in front of Saul's stall, which is said to be 'oblique' (*schief*). The stall of Moses is said to 'taper diagonally'; and the same manuscript as the *Division* contains elsewhere the information that John the Baptist has a lattice window out of which he can see and be seen, which is only meaningful if the adjacent stall does not block the view of the majority of spectators.

Similar calculations can be made for the opposite, south side of the square. The correctness of the deduction about the 9 feet or 9 feet 6 inches measurements is confirmed. For two successive stalls one dimension is stated as '9 feet towards the middle of the square'; in one case the other dimension is stated as '7 feet broad' and in the other case as '11 1/2 feet long'. This makes absolutely clear that the terms 'long' and

'broad' do not consistently signify a specific direction on the Lucerne *Weinmarkt*. In adding up the total length of stalls, we must note that the *Division* leaves a 3-foot gap above the Synagogue before the Temple, the body of which is 23 feet long plus 5 feet for the choir, making a total of 28 feet. The Templars' stall<sup>2</sup> is 7 feet broad; next to it comes the stall for Caiaphas's group, which is 11½ feet long and extends 1½ feet into the Butcher's passage (see later); the stall of the Herald (*Proclamator*) is 14½ feet long and finally the Musicians' stall tapers and is 19 feet long, taking up the remaining space before we reach the trellis blocking off the *Kornmarkt*. The total length of these stalls is 103 feet. We can see that this fits the plan well, especially since the SW corner does not have any structure comparable to Hell in the NW corner.

The above addition also confirms which corner of the Pfyffer house is opposite the lower end of the Synagogue: it has to be the lower corner, for otherwise the row of stalls would reach too far into the upper corner of the square and leave no room for the entry procession which uses this SE corner. This positioning also fits the wording which says the Synagogue starts at the corner beside the Pfyffer house since here is the narrow alleyway between it and the von Wyl house visible on the plan. It also confirms that the Temple is one of the row of stalls along this side of the square and not a structure out in front of the stalls.

Cysat put the Temple on the stage plan because it was important for him. This has led commentators to assume that it is a separate structure out in front of the row of stalls, and it appears like this on the model and the plans of August am Rhyn.<sup>3</sup> Figure 71 in Richard and Helen Leacroft's *Theatre and Playhouse* (London: Methuen, 1984) is ambiguous; it puts the Temple somewhat further out from the row of houses than the Synagogue, but not clearly out in the acting area. Further reflection makes it clear that such a structure out in the relatively restricted central area would be a considerable hindrance; but commentators have not hitherto considered this aspect.

Similarly we need to look again at the statement that the stall of Caiaphas reaches 1½ feet into the Butchers' passage. This has generally been assumed to mean that this passageway was used as a means of parking excess numbers of performers in a stall going backwards into the passageway, yet going only eighteen inches into it. The first problem with this, as should have been realised much sooner, is that such a stall would block the six-foot-wide corridor around behind the stalls, which the *Division* makes clear runs along both north and south sides of the square, presumably underneath the spectator stands. This was the means by which servants brought their masters food and drink during the time they were required to be present though had no part in the action; it also allowed performers to slip out and in when they had either a change of costume or a change of role.

We can now realize that the usage which states this stall stretches  $1\frac{1}{2}$  feet 'into' the butchers' passage is the same as that which states the musicians stall stretches all but 4 feet in front of the Krämer house.

The situation in front of the Sun has three elements: the stalls, the other objects immediately in front of the frontage and the items above ground level on the frontage. Regarding the position of the stall for Christ and the 12 Apostles it becomes clear that it ends at the corner of the building, and that the way it appears to project out to the right on the Plan for Day 1 is merely the way Cysat's writing extended; indeed the corresponding writing on the Plan for Day 2 is flat against the wall of the house. Such a projection is in any case extremely implausible, as it would impede severely the entry procession at the start of each day's performance, which came in from the *Kornmarkt*.

There are mutually contradictory statements about the location of the stall of the Church Fathers and we are forced to accept that Hardmeyer's *Division* can be wrong, since it locates them in the same place as Christ and the Apostles, whereas all other information locates them at the other side, though with their stall not stretching completely to the corner. This seems right for two reasons: first, there must be room for the ladder going up to Heaven; second, there must be room for the entry procession of King Kaspar with his elephant – the gap appears to be about 6 feet. It is confirmed by the document about the entry procession in 1560, which also states that they were in this position at the earlier performance.

Heaven is located between the two oriels (which no longer exist today) and the Choir (*Sengery*) is beneath it. The stall for the donkeys is beside the position of the Church Fathers at ground level; it seems reasonable to suppose that they had about 6 feet headroom; the Choir is stated to be 8 feet high. This makes the floor of Heaven about 14 feet off the ground, which fits well with the height of Mount Sinai = Mount of Olives, which is 8 feet. Heaven projects  $7\frac{1}{2}$  feet out from the façade and is 11 feet long at the front edge. Its floor level is level with the bottom of the windows. Access to Heaven is by a ladder with a handrail, which it seems started some 14 feet to the side of the Church Fathers' stall; since it is also about 14 feet off the ground we apparently have an isosceles triangle in which the ladder rises at an angle of  $45^\circ$ .

The *Division* contains further information about the mountain. It is 5 feet x 6 feet on top and probably 8 feet x 7 feet at ground level (though the text just might be interpreted as meaning that one side is 7 feet and the other 8 feet, leaving one to deduce about the other dimension). It seems likely that the flat top was at the back, nearer the Sun, implying that the front was less steep than the sides. The stage plans are no help here as they represent the mountain two-dimensionally, flat against the

façade. The *Division* records the state of affairs on the day after the performance, therefore the mountain is in its position as Mount of Olives, further north, having been further south as Mount Sinai on Day 1. Moses comes to the top of the mountain from ground level and God the Father and his angels visit it from Heaven. Just visible on the plans is the small 'side ladder' (*bystäglin*) from the main ladder to Heaven by which this is achieved. We know the mountain was hollow. The serpent hides inside from before the start of the performance until the Temptation, and when Moses is given the Ten Commandments smoke is sent out and the horns are blown from inside it. On the second day the painter sprinkles Christ's face with 'blood' from within the mountain when he prostrates himself to pray for the third time in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Though the *Division* states that the mountain is moved from in front of one oriel to in front of the other, no precise distance is stated. I have assumed the mountain to be 8 feet long and drawn it in as being moved its own length. It is 9 feet out from the façade towards the centre of the square and since, as mentioned above, Heaven is 7½ feet wide, this leaves 1½ feet space for the sloping ladder.

On the western side the acting area is bordered by the staging covering the fountain (*brunnenbrugi*), with the main spectator stand (*houptbrugi*) behind it and Hell alongside them both. Despite the length of the sections of *Division* dealing with this area, Cysat as usual concentrates on the series of points which cause him concern and is not aiming to provide a complete set of detailed information for the benefit of modern scholars, with the result that we cannot be confident that we are understanding his statements about this area correctly.

Reference must here be made again to the land registry plan (*Katasterplan*) of 1790, since it shows the fountain some 6½ feet further north than its present location. It seems most probable that it was in that position at the time of the performances and I have therefore drawn it in that position, rather than in its present position, which has been the assumption generally made in previous scholarship. That plan also suggests that the fountain has now been rotated some 22° from its earlier positioning.

The importance of this relocation is seen at once when one considers the information about Hell, which has it fitting exactly alongside the basin of the fountain. We can note that Hell has a back door and that its rear is raised, and will return to these points shortly.

The thorniest problem in the material here concerns the dimensions of the structure over the fountain. Its dimensions are 24½ feet x 32 feet. Hardmeyer's *Division* states that the 32-foot dimension is 'backwards' (*hinderhin*), which ought to

mean away from the acting area. The effect of drawing it in this way round can be seen on my plan. It leaves an implausibly large gap in the south-west corner, far more than is needed for the entry of King Balthasar with his camel. If, however, one takes these two dimensions the other way round, everything fits remarkably well, as can be seen with the dotted lines on the plan, where the space left in the corner is about 6 feet, the space likewise left in the diagonally opposite corner for the entry of King Kaspar with his elephant (see above p. 350).

That the dimensions are indeed to be understood this way round is substantiated by reference to the back door from Hell mentioned above. The rear of Hell is stated to reach to 6 feet from the door of the Tanners' Hall, the position of which can be seen on the Martini plan. If the 32-foot dimension were to go in this direction away from the acting area, the rear of Hell would be several feet in front of the start of the main spectator stand; however, if the 24<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>-foot dimension goes in this direction, then Hell's back door is several feet under the main stand, which makes much better sense.

We saw already in relation to the stall of the Church Fathers that the *Division* can be wrong; in the light of the details just discussed, I conclude that this set of dimensions have to be understood as suggested. I can think of no statements anywhere else in the surviving material which contradict this, and from here onwards it is assumed to be correct.

The Hut of the Nativity is situated on the front edge of this staging. We can deduce indirectly that it is not a permanent structure, since the same place is said to be also John the Baptist's desert where he preaches before baptizing his followers in the Jordan which flows (presumably temporarily) immediately in front, as shown on Cysat's plan for Day 1. That the hut is removed resolves another ambiguity. The string on which the star of Bethlehem is fixed as it leads the magi to the hut is said at one point to be fixed to the top of the hut, but elsewhere it is said to be fixed to the top of the pillar of the fountain. We can see from our plan that they are very close together, and if the hut is a temporary structure, the string almost certainly was fixed to the fountain.

We are also informed in the *Division* that the rear part of this staging over the fountain, i.e. the part furthest from the acting area, is three feet higher than the rest, as far as Barrabas's stocks. How far back this step occurs can be calculated. It is 7 feet from the front edge to the lid of the tomb, the tomb is 2 feet wide, and from the tomb to the stocks is a further 8 feet, totalling 17 feet. As can be seen on my plan, the 17 feet from the front edge is just beyond the edge of the fountain's basin, at a point where it would be easier to install the additional timbers required to strengthen the structure where it gets higher. That makes this raised higher section of this staging

6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> feet from front to back. This raised higher section has not been considered by scholars hitherto, yet it is clearly important when we consider the use to which the whole area of staging over the fountain was put. Cysat's plans show groups of performers here and it seems that this raised rear section of the staging functioned as a kind of 'stall' like those along the two long sides of the acting area. The larger, lower part of the staging, however, was part of the performing area.

The discrepancies between the plans Cysat drew for Days 1 and 2 of the 1583 performance are numerous and this point has already been made elsewhere regarding the staging over the fountain. On the plan for Day 1 lines are drawn right down the structure, including not only its surface but also its front, dividing it into four; but since one of the lines goes behind the steps, it is clear that they should not be taken literally – which is confirmed by their absence from the plan for Day 2. The consistent element is that the group around Pilate and his wife is here on both days, though in terms of the action they come into only the second half of Day 2. On Day 1 the left-hand column contains the names of the group around Goliath, totalling only 4 persons; the whole Pilate group is fitted into the next column, including his wife and her two servants, an overall total of 18 (which is correct when we follow the details in *Division and Numbers* – a further document Cysat wrote for 1583, which lists details of the groups – and includes two Horn-blowers); the third column names the three kings and their courtiers (numbering 18 in all according to the same source), and in the fourth column are the Canaanite woman, the Samaritan woman, Rachel and her son, the cripple, the bed-ridden man and the two blind men Lucillus and Marcellus. It can be demonstrated by examining the lists of actors and their parts that most of these people outside the Pilate group had other roles, and were most probably present on the stage over the fountain only briefly. It certainly makes an excellent position for the three kings and their retinues to retire to after presenting their gifts to the Christ Child in the hut.

It is however clearly the stall for the Pilate group. Christ is dragged from the stall of Caiaphas (who sits on a seat) by the four who are allocated to Pilate's group: Nero, Hercules, Agrippa and Cirus and according to the stage direction after line 8084 '[. . .] they come to Pilate's stall, then the other Jews all stand still in the acting area (*am platz*) apart from these four who go up the steps and present the Saviour to Pilate'. The stage direction alongside line 8121 says 'Pilate stands up', making clear that thus far he was sitting to speak. This would be an excellent position for him to be heard and seen whilst still sitting. (We may note that the stalls of Pilate, Herod and Caiaphas are on different sides of the square, ensuring the maximum of movement between the various phases of the trial of Christ.)



It is noteworthy that all the surviving information relating to the 1538, 1545 and 1560 performances also consistently has the basic Pilate group in the entry processions for both days, despite its restricted role in the action. Some of this earlier information also suggests strongly that this area over the fountain was subdivided; one version of the 1560 entry procession for Day 1 (MS 170, 1-12) states: 'On the fountain on the right side: Pilate, Goliath, Nero, Hercules, Agrippa, Cirus, Israhel, Pilate's wife, the six mothers with the innocents, Samaritan woman, Canaanite woman, Rachel. On the other side: the three kings: Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar'. The corresponding section for Day 2 reads: 'On the stand (*brügi*) [John the] Baptist, Pilate, his wife, Nero, Hercules, Agrippa, Cirus, his [i.e. Pilate's] banner-bearer, six men at arms'.

We may therefore conclude that Pilate and some of his retinue are in this position over the fountain throughout both days of the performance, though other members of the group come and go, and that this raised part of the stand over the fountain is indeed their 'stall'.

Finally we come to the steps which give access to this area over the fountain. Their dimensions are given as 5 feet broad and 15 feet long, as we would expect. And as we have seen elsewhere, this does not decide which way round is meant. Whereas in my 1989 article I argued that they projected only 5 feet out into the acting area and were in modern terms 15 feet wide, in the *Festschrift* for Hansjürgen Linke in 1994 I argued that they should be the other way round, and that the corner from which they are measured is in fact the corner of the stand over the fountain.<sup>4</sup> My initial disinclination to believe this interpretation was based on the feeling that it meant they projected too far out into the acting area. But as can be seen from my plan, the dimensions do all fit this interpretation. The steps can start 16 feet from the corner of the staging over the fountain itself, and project 15 feet up the square towards the Sun, and they do then leave a gap wide enough for access to Hell. This way round also has the great advantage of making much less problematical the fitting in of the items which are supposed to be in front of the staging. Most tantalising of these is the 'table' for their excellencies the mayors. On Cysat's plan this is only mentioned on the plan for Day 2, and there in the paler ink which appears to mark later additions. However, we know it did already exist in 1587 as it is there in the *Division*, where it is referred to as a plank (*tili*), presumably the floorboards which ensured stable seating for their excellencies; Cysat also based himself here during the performance. The relationship between 'table' and 'floorboards' remains obscure. By having these important spectators here we see how performers and spectators could be mixed.

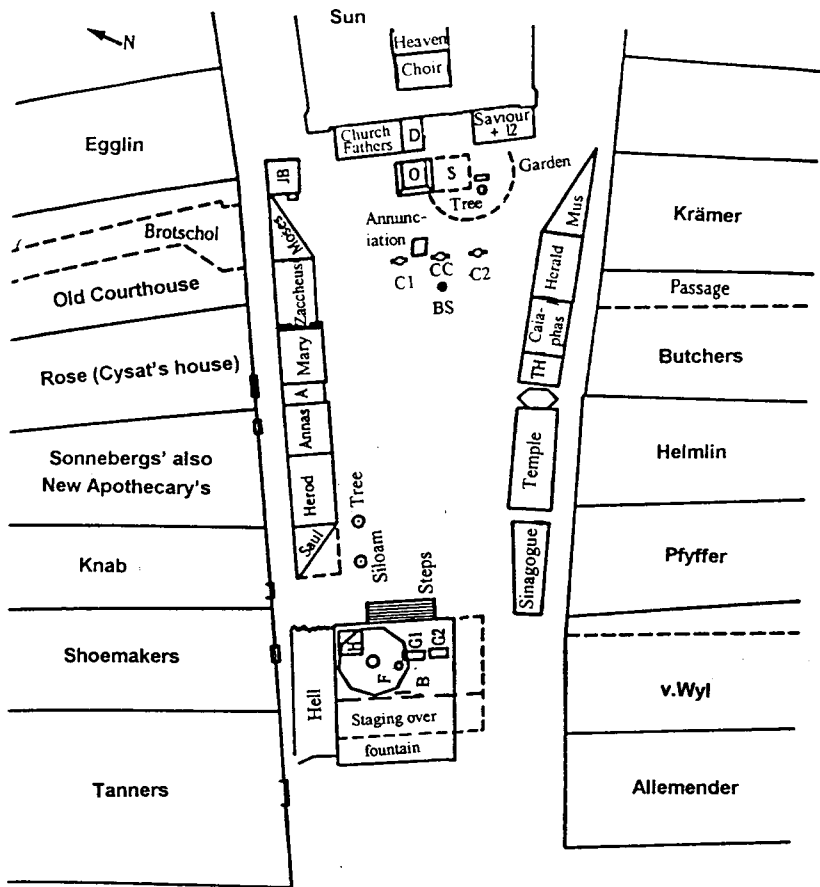
The dimensions which apparently have to fit across the front of the staging are:

16 feet from the corner nearest the Synagogue, 5 feet the width of the steps; 6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> feet the rear of Old Isaac's stall. These figures add up to more than 24 feet and provide further confirmation that my interpretation of the 24 feet x 32 feet dimensions is correct. In addition we are told this floorboard of the mayors' stall reaches 16 feet from the corner of the staging nearest Hell to the steps, at an angle, from which in some way 9 feet are to be reserved for Old Isaac's stall. None of my attempts over several years to insert all these details on a plan has satisfied me.

This brings us back to the conclusion unavoidable whenever we attempt to understand the surviving Regie material from Lucerne. It consists of notes written by the series of directors, Salat, Bletz and above all Cysat, for themselves and possibly for their successors, certainly for people who knew the totality and needed reminding how best to cope with the difficulties; it is no wonder that modern commentators who have only these notes to work on can ascertain most of the main outline but are left floundering on significant matters of detail. Further examination and publication of the relevant documents which Evans excluded provides the best hope for greater enlightenment.

Abbreviations on the plan of the square

A	Apothecary
B	Barrabas's stocks
BS	Brazen Serpent
C1 & C2	Crosses of 2 thieves
CC	Cross of Christ
D	Donkey(s)
F	[pillar for] Flagellation
G1 & G2	Tombs (Graves) 1 & 2
H	Hut of the Nativity
JB	John the Baptist
Mus	Musicians
O	[Mount of] Olives
S	[Mount] Sinai
TH	'Templars', i.e. Jews in Temple; see note 2



The Weinmarkt in Lucerne during the Passion Play Performance of 1583

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This is a correction to what I wrote in German about this section. My computer's first attempt at this sentence produced 'the stall of Herod's upper end' which I amended only with great regret.

<sup>2</sup> The German uses the word *Tempelherren*, in other contexts normally translated *Templars*, to denote those Jews who are based in the Temple; the abbreviation TH is used on my plan.

<sup>3</sup> The model is now in the Swiss Theatre Museum (Schweizerisches Theatermuseum) in Berne, where the Director, Dr Dreier, kindly gave me access to examine and to photograph it at a time when it was not on general display.

<sup>4</sup> The relevant publications in date order are: 'Die Luzerner Passionsspielaufführung des Jahres 1583: zur Deutung der Bühnenpläne Renward Cysats' in *The Theatre in the Middle Ages*, ed. by H. Braet, J. Nowe, G. Tournay (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985) pp. 352-61; 'Die Zuschauertribünen auf dem Luzerner Weinmarkt: zum Osterspiel 1583', in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 107 (1988), 106-16; 'Die schriftlichen Zeugnisse zur Luzerner Osterspielaufführung des Jahres 1583 und Ihr Verhältnis zu den Bühnenplänen Renward Cysats', *Daphnis*, 18 (1989), 223-49; 'Zuschauer und Darsteller im Luzerner Passionsspiel', in *Mittelalterliches Schauspiel: Festschrift für Hansjürgen Linke zum 65. Geburtstag* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994). The variation in my usage between *Osterspiel* and *Passionsspiel* reflects my desire to keep both Germans and Swiss happy. The Swiss, led by the Luzerner, have always labelled the play *Osterspiel*, since it was performed in Easter week; current scholarship is clear that this is a *Passionsspiel*, i.e. includes scenes from the life of Christ and the Old Testament and is not confined to the events of Easter Day and after. Similarly when M.B. Evans's seminal book *The Passion Play of Lucerne* (see above p. 348) was translated into German in Switzerland the title was rendered *Das Osterspiel von Luzern*.