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Erin Sullivan Maynes  
*Los Angeles County Museum of Art*

### **Value Judgments. Notgeld and Exchange with an ‘Inflation Saint’ in Thuringia\***

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Erin Sullivan Maynes

## Value Judgments. *Notgeld* and Exchange with an 'Inflation Saint' in Thuringia<sup>1</sup>

*Notgeld*, or emergency money, was a phenomenon of Germany's decade of inflation (1914-1924). Created in tens of thousands of unique issues, this provisional currency produced by municipalities, businesses, and local banks was initially intended as a temporary substitute for the often unavailable Reichsmark. As the inflation wore on, however, *Notgeld* became more than a replacement for the Reichsmark; it became a fixture of local economies, a desirable collectible, and a visual space to promote identity, express anxieties, and assert independence from the political and economic turmoil of the nation. This essay explores how *Notgeld* produced by the town of Kahla in Thuringia, a prolific centre for the production of emergency money, interrogated concepts of community, labour, and value during the inflation. It also examines the exchange between Kahla and a different kind of community influenced by inflation: followers of the so-called "Inflationsheiliger" Friedrich Muck-Lamberty. Muck-Lamberty promoted values very different from those of the communities he encountered on his tour through Thuringia in 1920, offering an explicit alternative to the social and economic status quo. The story of Muck-Lamberty's visit to Kahla and the scandal that ensued was the basis for a set of notes that became the town's first financially successful *Notgeld* series.

### Introduction

Money rarely features in utopian imaginings, but as Georg Simmel recognized in *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900), money is a tool, less a material object than a series of functions: it provides a universal measure of value, mediates exchange, and circulates in order to facilitate further exchange. Might money, then, offer a means for remaking the economic and social order? Reimagining money might encourage society to reimagine how it distributes resources and determines value. Community currencies are one contemporary example of this type of reimagining. They work alongside existing systems of exchange

<sup>1</sup> A previous version of this article appeared as Erin Sullivan Maynes, Currency and Community. Labor, Identity, and *Notgeld* in Inflation-Era Thuringia, in: Paul Lerner/Joel Segal (eds.), *Alternative Realities. Utopian Thought in Times of Political Rupture*, GHI Bulletin Supplement 14, Washington D.C. 2019, pp. 39-56. The author thanks the German Historical Institute (GHI) for permission to publish a revised version of the essay here.

and their emphasis on sourcing and buying locally focuses attention on the commercial activity of the community. They also stress one's potential connections to the producer or seller elevating the importance of labour and human capital in the production of goods and services. The focus on local labour and local goods keeps the circle of economic exchange close and tight, preserving its benefits for those within – and usually only those within – the community.

Today's community currencies are a limited phenomenon with an impact that is more ideological than economic. However, alternatives to established financial systems have long existed, enabling commodity exchange at the local level when national or international networks fail or offering a means of evading the control of larger political and economic institutions. During Germany's decade-long inflation, which lasted from 1914 to the end of 1923, such alternatives included the black market, but municipalities also created their own versions of community currencies as a substitute for the declining and often unavailable Reichsmark. Called *Notgeld*, or emergency money, it was typically valid for only brief periods and was initially seen as a stopgap solution to a temporary crisis. But as the inflation wore on, *Notgeld* became a fixture of local economies. Communities created notes that were clever and eye-catching, designed to attract collectors drawn to the novelty of new issues. Ultimately, *Notgeld* functioned as more than money: it offered a visual space for advertising the community by presenting local stories, promoting local products, and praising local character. It also became a means of directly and indirectly expressing anxieties, asserting alternatives, and carving out the community as a space separate from the political and economic turmoil of the nation.

Other communities emerged during the inflation, self-selecting groups whose identities were likewise shaped by the economic crisis. These communities of choice were built on the utopian aspirations of thinkers with radically different visions for the future. They included the so-called *Inflationsheiligen*, who inspired followers with their rejection of bourgeois norms and the mix of radical religious and political beliefs they preached. Their challenge to the status quo often included a repudiation of materialism and modern life. The communities they attracted were not fixed in place, but itinerant, their leaders preaching as they moved through town and countryside, attracting young followers to their cause as they went. These figures offered an explicit alternative to the communities of place they encountered, one that challenged existing social and economic arrangements with promises of a more authentic way of being.

This essay explores the role of *Notgeld* in interrogating ideas of community, labour, and value during the inflation. It also examines the encounter between a community of place and a community of choice that was mediated, in part, by *Notgeld*. *Notgeld* was used by localities to assert value – and, by extension,

values – during the inflationary years of the early Weimar Republic, a moment when money and established national financial institutions were failing. *Notgeld* reinforced community boundaries by confining economic activity to contained areas and strengthened community bonds through its designs and messages. But it also expressed the tensions – exacerbated by the sustained and persistent economic crisis of inflation – that existed between community insiders and outsiders. These dynamics operated in a revealing way in the town of Kahla in Thuringia. Kahla was a prolific centre for the production and sale of *Notgeld*, but it also became the site of a standoff between the town and a community of choice that formed around one of the *Inflationsheiligen*, Friedrich Muck-Lamberty. The exchange between the two emblemizes the radically different visions of communal life inspired by the inflation, an exchange that played out through *Notgeld*.

### *Notgeld and Sammlerscheine. Collecting Local Currencies*

*Notgeld* was the outcome of necessity and enterprise, a hybrid born of economic chaos. It appeared throughout the German Reich from the beginning of the First World War through the end of 1923, the height of Germany's hyperinflation. *Notgeld* first came into circulation as a way of temporarily addressing acute shortage of low-denomination notes and coin necessary for economic transactions nationwide.<sup>2</sup> This shortage was the result of hoarding – due to the military's demand for metal, the material value of most coins surpassed their face value – and the fact that inflation forced one to pay more money for basic goods. Thus, the amount of paper money in circulation – both official paper Reichsmarks as well as unofficial *Notgeld* – ballooned. But because *Notgeld* was necessarily provisional, with each note valid for only short periods, and because it was an insistently local form of payment, the number of *Notgeld* issues rapidly proliferated.

<sup>2</sup> The *Reichsbank* set the stage for what Gerald Feldman calls 'unlimited monetary emission' with the passage of the Loan Bureau Law (*Darlehenskassengesetz*) on 4 August 1914, the day Germany formally entered the First World War. The law enabled the *Reichsbank* to increase the supply of money without being subject to the one-third rule (requiring that at least one-third of the currency in circulation be covered by the *Reichsbank*'s gold reserves, the basis for the gold standard). Early on, the Bank was able to issue loan bureau notes in small denominations to cover shortages, so that any *Notgeld* issued could be quickly pulled from circulation. In later years, however, the Bank was no longer able to respond so quickly and even sanctioned *Notgeld* during periods when the supply of the *Papiermark* was especially tight. See Gerald Feldman, *The Great Disorder. Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924*, Oxford 1997.

As *Notgeld* became more common throughout Germany, local economies came to rely on it as an alternative form of payment and, increasingly, as a source of revenue. The latter was the result of *Sammlerscheine*, bills designed for the audience of *Notgeld* collectors attracted to the ever-growing number of unique provisional notes. The audience for this collectible cash was significant enough that specialty publications such as the journal *Das Notgeld* appeared to inform collectors of the availability of new issues and the rising value of sought-after notes.<sup>3</sup>

The most famous *Sammlerscheine* are *Serienscheine*, most of which were created from 1920 through 1922. These were not intended for circulation, but were sold directly to the collector's market by issuers or by numismatic dealers and auction houses such as Robert Ball Nachfolger in Berlin. The serial format of *Serienscheine* allowed them to narrate stories or present thematic groupings, but they were also meant to appeal to the acquisitive sensibility of collectors. Successful issuers were expert at offering notes in a range of variants with different text, colours, and sizes, attracting those compelled to collect each and every version. Other issuers focused on making individual sets highly desirable through their designs, hiring known artists to illustrate them or relying on popular or sensational content that would appeal to audiences outside their immediate vicinity. *Serienscheine* demonstrate how money itself had become an object that had the potential to be marketed and sold – and suggested that a community's self-sufficiency during inflation might depend on making money that was less a currency than a commodity.

True *Sammlerscheine* were not designed to circulate; notes' expiration date at times even preceded their issue date, rendering them immediately worthless as a form of payment. But as collectibles, these notes did offer potential rewards for issuers. The town of Naumburg in Saxony-Anhalt, for instance, was able to renovate the town *Rathaus* with the revenues generated from a set of popular *Notgeld* illustrating the siege of the city by the Hussites in the fifteenth century. The set, designed by the artist Walter Hege in a silhouette motif, was so successful that it went through more than three reissues. In 1921, Naumburg generated more than 900,000 Reichsmark in profit from *Notgeld* sales alone.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Das Notgeld: Zeitschrift für Notgeldkunde* was published in Munich from 1919 through at least 1922. Other publications such as *Die Notgeld-Sammler: Zentral-Organ für den gesamten Notgeld Markt* also appeared during this period. In addition, there were *Sammlervereine* which were organized under an umbrella association called the *Verband Großdeutscher Notgeld-Sammler-Vereine*.

<sup>4</sup> Ursula Dittrich-Wagner, Walter Hege und das Naumburger Notgeld, <https://mv-naumburg.de/projekte/themen/notgeld> [03.02.2023]. The series was first issued in November 1920 in a run of 4,000 copies. This first version, issued in six designs worth fifty Pfennig each, included four misprints omitting the addition of 'Pfg' from the denomination. Due

Hege's Naumburg notes underscore the characteristics typical of successful collector issues: they are attractively designed, function as a narrative set, and relate local lore. The story relayed by Hege's notes is known as the *Hussiten-Kirschfest Sage*, the basis for the annual Naumburg *Kirschfest*. According to the tale, the children of Naumburg saved the town by pleading with the Hussite general for mercy. The general took pity and gave the children cherries to curb their hunger. Like the story, which is a part of the city identity, Hege's Expressionist-inspired silhouettes were successful enough that they became indelibly associated with the event. In fact, Hege's silhouettes are still used to advertise Naumburg's *Kirschfest* today.

*Notgeld* notes are very often counterproductive in their primary function as currency. Their ever-changing designs, denominations, and dates of expiration required more attention of bearers and receivers. Such currency was unsanctioned and the federal government tolerated its use only reluctantly; issuers took pains to distinguish their notes from official Reichsmarks by avoiding the designation *Geld* and creating issues that were distinctive. *Sammlerscheine*, however, were made to be looked at; notes' value was determined by their ability to attract attention and to draw viewers to focus on their designs and narratives. Because of the distinct visual nature of *Sammlerscheine*, its function as a collectible object, that could also be a revenue-generating commodity, superseded its function as a medium of exchange. It became a space for sharing messages and meditations – sometimes about the community itself, but also on the nature of money and value.

### *Cultural Dimension of Notgeld. The Case of Kahla as 'Hauptstadt der deutschen Ersatzwährung'*

The town of Kahla in Thuringia was especially notable for the number of *Notgeld* series it issued and for the way its *Serienscheine* modeled these varied approaches to attracting collectors. Kahla, named "die geheime Hauptstadt der deutschen Ersatzwährung" by one scholar, produced fourteen series in twelve themes, of which up to six were produced in variants that were repeatedly reissued

to immediate demand, Naumburg issued a second run of 20,000 about three weeks later, on which the missing 'Pfg' had been corrected. In February 1921, Hege was commissioned to create another six silhouettes for the series, and a set of twelve notes was issued. Finally, as Dittrich-Wagner documents, the misprinted notes, which were in high demand by collectors, were likewise reissued in a run of 5,000 in May 1921. Pictures of these designs can be found in Hans-Ludwig Grabowski/Manfried Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld. Deutsche Serienscheine, 1918-1922*, Bd. 2, Regenstauf 2009.

sued.<sup>5</sup> A number of these sets reference the larger economic and political situation in Germany to appeal to a broader collecting audience, but many others focus on local landmarks, local products, and local stories. An example of the latter includes the souvenir set celebrating the castle of Leuchtenburg, one of the city's most notable sights. The set is composed of three notes in denominations of twenty-five, fifty, and seventy-five Pfennigs, each showing different aerial views of the castle.

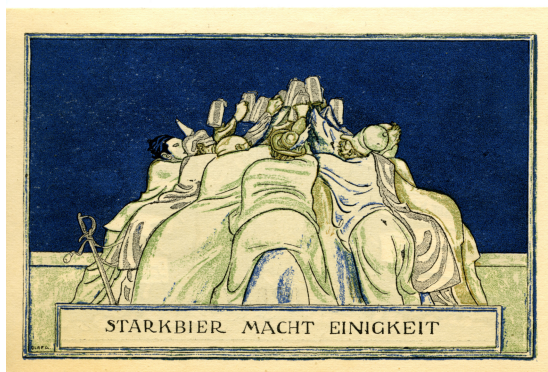


Abb. 1: Olaf Gulbransson (designer), Kahla Notgeld Series, recto 75 Pfennig and verso 'Starkbier macht Einigkeit' and 'Einigkeit macht stark', issued 1921.

An example of a Kahla *Notgeld* set aimed at a national rather than a local audience is the popular satirical series designed by the Norwegian artist Olaf Gulbransson, best known as an illustrator for the magazine *Simplicissimus*.<sup>6</sup> The series is comprised of three sets of pairs; in one set of notes, titled "Deutsche Merkur", a man with iconographic attributes referencing the German Michael (cap), the god Mercury (winged sandals), and St. Sebastian (shot with arrows and tied to a post) faces off against a large woman in a breastplate marked "RE" for *Republique française*, who aims a charged bow at his chest. On the second note, the German Mercury is on the phone, writing out reparations payments in blood with one of the arrows he has pulled from his own body. The notes refer-

reference Germany's payments to France, a hated condition of the Treaty of Versailles that exacerbated the financial crisis. Another set mocks pretensions of national unity (Fig. 1): the first note's inscription ironically proclaims "Einig-

<sup>5</sup> Wolfgang Kemp, *Wir haben ja alle Deutschland nicht gekannt. Das Deutschlandbild der Deutschen in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik*, Heidelberg 2016, p. 302.

<sup>6</sup> See Grabowski/Mehl, 668.6a, b (1-3), 668.10, and 668.11 (1-6).

keit macht stark", while the illustration below depicts a group of figures falling on each other in a violent brawl. In the next note, these men seem to have resolved their differences: they clink glasses together beneath an inscription that reads 'Starkbier macht Einigkeit'.

Perhaps the most unusual of Kahla's *Serienscheine* is the twelve-part Statistical Series from 1921, another set that looks beyond Kahla to the nation.<sup>7</sup> The recto of each note displays the same image of a man's head before a brick wall, with the inscription: 'Was das Schicksal uns zerbrach, neu erstehe nach und nach - traget Steine zu dem Bau, deutscher Mann und deutsche Frau'. The verso of each note includes a different diagram tracking statistical measures tracing the effects of inflation, the war, and its aftermath on the German economy. This includes the growth in the child mortality rate between 1913 and 1918, the reduction in the size of the German Empire due to the Treaty of Versailles, a pie chart illustrating reparations spending as a portion of the total budget, and the inflated prices of eggs, butter, and milk in different German cities on a single day in April 1921. The most self-referential note tracks the 'Inflation of Notes in Circulation from 1913-1920', comparing circulation rates in different countries, including England, France, and Spain, to those in Germany. Unsurprisingly, the number of notes in circulation in Germany dwarfs that of the currency circulating in all other countries, consuming nearly half of the note's vertical space. The Statistical Series attempts to visualize, literally and figuratively, the abstract nationwide economic effects of inflation by tying them to familiar reference points and illustrating these changes in easy-to-follow charts. The assertive but optimistic message on front of the notes, which suggests that German fortitude and resolve will enable the nation to rebuild itself, is thus challenged by the information presented on the back of the notes, in which the sober presentation of facts and figures details only the magnitude of the crisis.

The set that comes closest to promoting Kahla's contemporary identity is the Porcelain Series (Fig. 2).<sup>8</sup> Tied to a product manufactured locally since the nineteenth century, this three-note series serves to advertise and celebrate Kahla's porcelain as an enduring source of value, particularly when compared against the devalued Reichsmark. Visually, the notes equate two elements as essential to the city's identity: the iconic castle of Leuchtenburg and the porcelain itself, both of which feature in all three notes. The red-roofed castle migrates from left to right over the course of the three notes, while plates, teapots, cups, and saucers float above it, among the stars in one note, blending with the clouds in another and finally creeping over the globe in the final note, suggest-

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 668.7 (1-12).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 668.5 (1-3).



ing the international market for this locally made product. ‘Kahla versorgt für billig [sic] Geld / mit Porzellan die ganze Welt’, reads the first note. The verse separates Kahla's porcelain from devalued currency. The next two notes refer to the popular expression ‘Scherben bringen Glück’, with the last proclaiming: ‘Behaltet Kahlas Scherben fein / Das Glück soll drin verborgen sein’. Even in a damaged and functionless state, in other words, porcelain may still have value if it grants good luck. Thus, Kahla's porcelain retains a material value that the ‘cheap’ paper currency does not, though it is using the one to reinforce the other.



Fig. 2: Kahla Notgeld Porcelain Series, verso of 25, 50, 75 Pfennig, issued 1921 (designer unknown).

As an important centre for the sale and production of *Notgeld*, Kahla even staged a *Notgeld Ausstellung* from 3 to 11 September 1921, featuring over one hundred exhibitors with more than 50,000 *Notgeld* issues on view.<sup>9</sup> Collectors from throughout Germany were encouraged to attend, and certificates and a monetary prize were issued for the best designs. The Kahla notes featured prominently in advertising for the event; one series was newly released in time for the exhibition itself, a set known as the *Muckserie*, which promised to find broad success as it related the story of a local scandal that had earned national attention: the rise and fall of the *Wanderprophet* Friedrich Muck-Lamberty.<sup>10</sup>

*Social Influencer of Inflation. The Inflationshelilige Friedrich Muck-Lamberty*

Friedrich Muck-Lamberty was a charismatic representative of the *Jugend-* and *Lebensreform* movements and one of the so-called *Inflationsheliligen* of the early 1920s, a group of quasi-religious messianic figures who could be viewed, on

<sup>9</sup> See Ingrid Bubeck, *Geldnot und Notgeld in Thüringen*, Erfurt 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Grabowski/Mehl, 668.2 (1-3).

the one hand, as an offshoot of what Ulrich Linse called Weimar *Sektenwesen* and the millenarian mood that accompanied postwar crises and economic troubles from 1918 to 1923.<sup>11</sup> Muck-Lamberty had contact with the *Wandervogel* movement when he was just nineteen years old. During the war, he joined the navy as part of a unit that was willing to accommodate his strict vegetarian diet. Although he did not experience the November Revolution firsthand, he did view it as an opportunity for the *völkisch* rebirth of Germany. By early 1920, he had founded the *Neue Schar*, a community of individuals composed mostly of young men, women, and children who were inspired by his teaching.

Muck, as many called him, wanted to lead his followers to pursue a more authentic life; he rejected the modern world in favour of the perceived simplicity of premodern ways of being. The members of the *Neue Schar* were motivated by a similar belief that the time was ripe for a spiritual turn, evident in the near constant social, political, and economic upheavals of postwar Germany. As Linse argues, the rituals of the *Neue Schar*, especially their ecstatic dances ‘entwickelte[n] Alternative zum Klassenkampf und sollte[n] die ‘Gemeinde’ als Form eines nichtpolitischen Sozialismus präfigurieren’.<sup>12</sup>

Like all *Inflationsheiligen*, the social disruption caused by the chaos of the revolution and inflation allowed Muck-Lamberty to redefine community in his own terms. The *Neue Schar* was self-selecting and composed primarily of young people committed to the strict lifestyle their charismatic leader demanded. As Muck-Lamberty and his flock made their now famous tour through Thuringia throughout 1920, they attracted attention and followers wherever they went. He was compared to the Pied Piper of Hamelin by observers based on the way he entranced the young; he was reported to have as many as one thousand followers, a number that grew with every stop he made.

Muck-Lamberty’s *Sündenfall* transpired in early 1921 in Kahla near Leuchtenburg, where the leader and his followers had wintered at the castle, which functioned at the time as a youth hostel. Käthe Kühl, a female friend of Muck-Lamberty and a member of the *Neue Schar*, informed the local authorities in Altenburg that Muck-Lamberty was maintaining a ‘Haremwirtschaft’ and accused him of desecrating ‘das Heiligtum der Weiblichkeit’.<sup>13</sup> He had, as it turned out, impregnated two women in the group and was engaged in sexual relationships with others. The leader was unapologetic, and many observers were unsurprised by the revelations, given the erotically charged nature of the *Neue Schar*’s activities. After Muck-Lamberty’s questioning, the director of the Leuchtenburg hostel requested that he and his group leave by February 1921.

<sup>11</sup> Ulrich Linse, *Barfüßige Propheten. Erlöser der zwanziger Jahre*, Berlin 1983, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

Some of Muck's followers left him, and supporters distanced themselves in the aftermath of the scandal.



Fig. 3: Kahla Notgeld 'Muck' Series, verso of 25, 50, 75 Pfennig, issued 1921 (Designer unknown).

Because of Muck-Lamberty's relative fame, the story brought national attention to Kahla, which saw an opportunity in the crisis. In August of 1921, the town released its *Muckserie*, a three-note set of twenty-five, fifty, and seventy-five Pfennig *Notgeld* which depicted the rise and fall of Muck-Lamberty and the *Neue Schar* in colour and verse (Fig. 3). The first note shows members of the *Neue Schar* dancing together in a circle as their leader pictures his destination: a stronghold on a hill, its outline resembling the iconic profile of Castle Leuchtenburg situated above Kahla. In the second note, Muck plays guitar and sings to his flock, his head emitting divine rays, his body towering over the castle of his imagination. On either side of his head, in hexagonal cartouches, storks bow their heads in Muck's direction. Then in the final note, these storks – symbols of birth – take flight. Muck hangs his head in shame as he is cast out of the city on the hill. He is now below the castle, dwarfed by the structure he dominated in the earlier note, while his followers turn away from him. The note's final lines underscore the meaning of the storks, noting that it is Muck himself adding to the *Neue Schar*'s numbers: 'Was ist vom guten Vorsatz nun, mein lieber Muck, geblieben? Zähl nur die Häupter deiner Schar: es sind statt sechste... sieben!'

Ironically, money featuring a man who rejected materialism constituted the first significant financial success for Kahla's *Notgeld* issuers. Indeed, it was the widespread awareness of Muck-Lamberty's downfall and the *Neue Schar* scandal that made the series popular with a broader collecting audience. Kahla generated a total net profit of 170,000 Marks from its sale, the first major set it issued as well as its first significantly profitable product.<sup>14</sup> The timing of the notes' release was also calculated for maximum impact. It coincided with the opening of Kahla's *Notgeld Ausstellung* in September of that year. There was even a commemorative note produced for the exhibition itself, which was valid only for the exhibition's nine-day run (Fig. 4).<sup>15</sup> The note's recto features a *trompe l'oeil* with an elegantly dressed man and a woman standing below a sign announcing the exhibition, ready to enter the exhibition space between parted curtains. On the verso, the note announces itself as 'Das Notgeld des Notgelds', and depicts a large dragon crouched above the castle of Leuchtenburg, blowing notes from its mouth at the people gathered below, who rush to grab them in a frenzy. The short verses on the bottom left announce: 'An der Saale hellem Strande Notgeld fliegt – ein ganzes Heer! Wenn die Werte auch verfallen, freut sich doch der Sammler sehr'.<sup>16</sup> The popularity of the Muck Series is underscored by the

<sup>14</sup> Detlev Belau, Friedrich Muck-Lamberty und die unvergessene Neue Schar, <https://www.naumburg-geschichte.de/geschichte/mucklambertyfortsetzung.htm> [03.02.2023].

<sup>15</sup> Grabowski/Mehl, 669.1.

<sup>16</sup> The art historian Jennifer Roberts has shown that the movement of paper currency and

fact that one of the notes fluttering above the crowd has the word ‘Muck’ written on it.

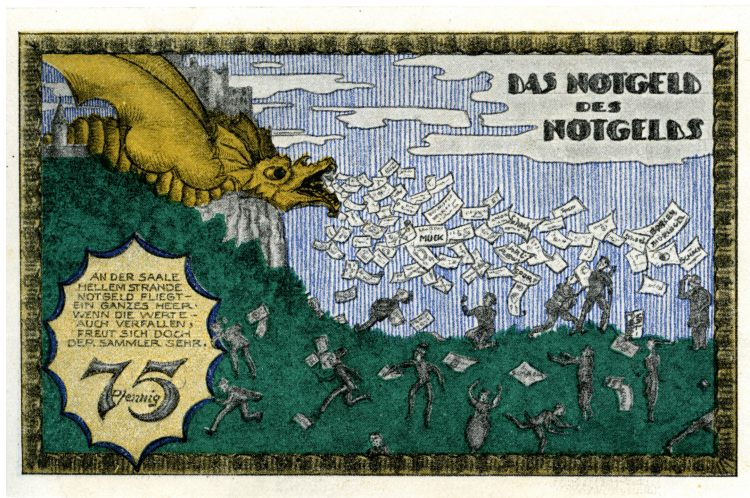


Fig. 4: Kahla Notgeld Ausstellung Note, recto and verso 75 Pfennig, issued 1921 (designer unknown).

In the aftermath of the Leuchtenburg incident, Muck-Lamberty stopped wandering and settled with the remainder of his flock not far away in Naumburg, just over the border of Thuringia in the state of Saxony-Anhalt. Coincidentally, this was also the place where Walter Hege had issued his successful *Scherenschnitt Notgeld* series illustrating the history of the town’s *Kirschfest* just a few years earlier. Between 1922 and 1923, Muck-Lamberty established a *Handwerksgemeinschaft*, which he named the *Werkschar* Naumburg, transforming the *Neue Schar* into a communal ‘*Werk*’ *Schar*, a community now defined by its commitment to skilled labour.<sup>17</sup> With this establishment of a fixed location, Muck-Lamberty’s chosen community came closer, superficially at least, to the values championed by the established communities that had rejected him. The *Werkschar* was stationary and engaged in productive work rather than disruptive itinerant activities.

credit often employed metaphors of ‘flight or flotation’. Similar descriptions were also attached to German graphics during the November Revolution. See Jennifer Roberts, *Transporting Visions. The Movement of Images in Early America*, Berkeley 2014, p. 115; Gustav Hartlaub, *Die neue deutsche Graphik*, Berlin 1920.

<sup>17</sup> The skilled labor settlement that Muck-Lamberty established in Naumburg was first tested during the winter in Leuchtenburg, where the group traded skilled work such as joinery for food with those in the community. Linse, p. 119.

It was not a radical departure for Muck-Lamberty, however, who had long believed that such a settlement was the appropriate communal form for his band of followers. He had planned for the founding of a community based on communistic principles as early as 1912 and had the idea to develop a skilled workers' land commune with what he called *Umwertungsstellen*, an echo of Nietzsche's call for the 'Umwertung aller Werte'.<sup>18</sup> The plans for this commune, however, were interrupted by the war. They were revived in Naumburg, where Muck-Lamberty decided that the community would focus on high-quality woodworking, specifically turning and joinery, skills Muck himself had acquired. The products manufactured by the *Werkschar* also offered the means for the community to become self-sufficient. The skilled labour of the community would, in other words, improve the *Werkschar* in both a spiritual and material sense.

The art historian and critic Wilhelm Uhde recalled encountering Muck-Lamberty and his followers when they were still the *Neue Schar* in his memoirs in 1920, at the height of the *Wanderprophet's* popularity. He noted that the two impulses the leader represented – the spiritual rejection of materialism with the simultaneous affirmation of handiwork – were not necessarily in conflict. For Muck-Lamberty, spiritual transcendence was connected to the material object through physical labour. Uhde argued: 'Die Neue Schar half die Jugend zu entmaterialisieren, sie anspruchslos und froh zu machen, aus den Banden des mechanischen zu befreien. Ihre Kräfte mit dem Segen des Handwerks neu zu verknüpfen, sie als wesentliche Faktoren einer deutschen Volksgemeinschaft einzuordnen'.<sup>19</sup>

A 1925 catalogue of the *Werkschar's* output is suggestive of this fusion of the premodern communal sensibilities of Muck-Lamberty's *Werkschar* with the possibilities of modern marketing (Fig. 5). The cover is an abstraction of a candlestick designed by the *Werkschar*, depicted as a series of downward-facing arrows balanced against the tips of upturned triangles. Nevertheless, this delicate balancing act is not realised by the rustic products inside, which are meant to evoke traditional sensibilities in their shape and assertive use of wood as a material.

<sup>18</sup> Belau.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*



Fig. 5: Cover and Interior Page of the Catalogue *Holzarbeiten*. Wilhelm Wismann, Vertretung der Werkschar Naumburg, Hamburg 1925. The Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The founding principles of Muck-Lamberty's *Werkschar* are not dissimilar to those of another self-selecting group dedicated to handicraft that emerged during this same period of post-revolutionary utopian enthusiasm as the *Neue Schar*: the *Bauhaus*. The *Bauhaus*, located only fifty kilometers from the *Werkschar* in its first iteration in Weimar, would seem to share few similarities with Muck-Lamberty's *Werkschar* based on the aesthetic output of both groups. We do know, however, that Muck-Lamberty spent at least a week in Weimar with the *Neue Schar* during his tour through Thuringia in 1920, and that Bauhaus students were attracted to events staged by the *Neue Schar* during that time.<sup>20</sup> Much has been written about the early years of the *Bauhaus*, when both its students and teachers were influenced by the residual utopianism of the Novem-

<sup>20</sup> Walter Gropius, the Bauhaus's founding director, also invited Ludwig Christian Haeusser, another of the *Inflationsheiligen*, to Weimar for a lecture in 1920, suggesting an interest in such figures during the school's earliest years. See Linse, p. 57f.

ber Revolution as well as the spiritualism of figures like Johannes Itten.<sup>21</sup> Less has been said about the impact of inflation more generally, although it had a profound influence, from the ideas and affiliations of its members to the types of projects it undertook. Interestingly, the first Bauhaus contract for a mass-produced product was not one of the streamlined designs for furniture or lighting, but the hyperinflationary issue *Notgeld* designed by Herbert Bayer for the Thuringian government in August 1923.<sup>22</sup>

It is worth considering how inflation influenced conceptions of labour and community at both the *Bauhaus* and the *Werkshar* Naumburg, two communities of choice built around utopian ideas centering work and craft. Both were led by individuals who conceived of community and the importance of labour – specifically *Handwerk* – in spiritual terms and looked to premodern sources for inspiration for the future. The opportunity for such thinking was encouraged by the environment of inflation. However, following the stabilization of the currency, the *Bauhaus* and the *Werkshar* proceeded along different paths. The *Bauhaus* increasingly directed its focus towards a future centred on modern materials and manufacturing. It moved to Dessau in 1925, a relocation forced by the 1923 election of a right-wing government in Weimar that viewed the *Bauhaus* as a suspicious, foreign presence. Political attacks by the National Socialists would continue to haunt the school, pushing it out of Dessau in 1931 and finally forcing its closure in 1933. Meanwhile, the *Werkshar*, which seems to have kept its vision on reviving communal working and living practices, remained in Naumburg and was tolerated by the locals. Although Muck-Lamberty's ideas would not gain wide currency, the products he produced at the *Werkshar* carried a distinctly *völkisch* vibe, one more easily integrated into the new political reality in Germany after 1933.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Elizabeth Otto, *Haunted Bauhaus. Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics*, Boston 2019; Oliver Gabet/Anne Monier (eds.), *The Spirit of the Bauhaus*, London 2018; Christoph Wagner (eds.), *Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik. Johannes Itten, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee*, Leipzig 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Bayer designed notes in 1, 2, 3, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 million, and 1 billion (milliard) Mark amounts. See Nele Heise, *Das Bauhaus in allen Taschen. Notgeldscheine als Vorboten der 'Neuen Typografie'*, in: Patrick Rössler (eds.), *Bauhauskommunikation. Innovative Strategien im Umgang mit Medien, interner und externer Öffentlichkeit*, Berlin 2009, p. 265-80. See also Erin Sullivan Maynes, *Making Money. Notgeld and the Material Experience of Inflation in Weimar Germany*, in: *Art History* 42:4, 2019, p. 678-701.

<sup>23</sup> Muck-Lamberty and many of the other *Inflationsheiligen* experienced renewed popularity with the onset of the worldwide Depression in 1930. Although Muck-Lamberty did not embrace National Socialism, he exhibited proto-fascist and anti-Semitic tendencies – what Ulrich Linse calls his 'Volksgemeinschaftssozialismus'. He did for a time find common cause with the left wing of the Nazi Party and explored an alliance with certain members. Ultimately, however, he kept his distance from Nazi affiliation. Nevertheless,



## Conclusion

With the stabilization of the economy in 1924 and the introduction of new secured currencies – the land-backed Rentenmark followed by the new Reichsmark – Notgeld was pulled from circulation and economic authority was once again returned to the nation. Nonetheless, the ambivalent attitudes and unresolved questions surfaced by the inflation – about the sources of economic value, about identity, and community belonging – would persist. The return of the status quo would not last, and with the onset of the worldwide Depression in 1930, those questions would manifest in different conclusions, ones with far more serious consequences for community insiders and outsiders in the years to come.

## Abbildungsnachweis

**Fig. 1-4:** Collection of the author, photo by author.

**Fig 5:** Wilhelm Wismann, *Vertretung der Werkschar Naumburg*, Hamburg 1925. The Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

his business thrived during the Third Reich, as *Volkskunst* reached a new level of popularity and foreign competition was driven out of the market. Linse, pp. 123-128.