



Wieland Held, Siegfried Hoyer, eds. *Quellen zu Thomas Müntzer*. Müntzer-Ausgabe: Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Leipzig: Verlag der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig (in Kommission bei der Evangelischen Verlagsanstalt Leipzig), 2004. 294 pp.

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Satan from Allstedt or God's Warrior?: Third-Person Perspectives on Thomas Müntzer

Thomas Müntzer remains one of the most enigmatic and fascinating characters of the Reformation era. An early ally of Martin Luther, Müntzer ultimately pushed for more radical reforms and distanced himself from his teacher. Luther responded by denouncing Müntzer as “mentally disturbed or drunk” (p. 124), as the “Satan from Allstedt” (p. 139), and as a wolf in sheep’s clothes (p. 171). Müntzer’s relationship to the Anabaptist movement—which was emerging in the mid-1520s—remains contested; in his theological beliefs he resembled the Anabaptists but also differed from them. His participation as a leader of the peasant uprising in 1525 made him a folk hero long before he was hailed as such by historians in the German Democratic Republic. For decades after the doomed Battle of Frankenhausen and Müntzer’s execution, his name stood for the social volatility associated with religious reform and the dangers of religious radicalism.

For this volume of source material about Müntzer, Siegfried Hoyer and the late Wieland Held collected numerous third-person accounts of Müntzer’s activity and influence. As such, the book makes for a fascinating read, as the reader encounters Müntzer through so many pairs of eyes. There are both familiar authors—Luther, Melancthon and the Saxon princes, among others—and more unfamiliar ones, such as chroniclers and local officials. Individuals are included who sought to distance themselves from Müntzer: the Basel Reformer Oecolampadius defended himself in a letter to

Willibald Pirckheimer, an influential citizen of Nuremberg, asking if he, Oecolampadius, should be considered an accomplice of Müntzer because he once offered a place at his table to an unknown refugee whom he had held to be an upright man (p. 194). Likewise, Andreas Karlstadt von Bodenstein, another early ally of Luther’s who was dissatisfied with the scope and speed of his teacher’s reforms, emphasized his shock at Müntzer’s attempt to reach out to him: “As soon as I read Müntzer’s letter, the blood ran cold [in my veins] ... and I was so shocked, that I recklessly ripped the letter to pieces” (p. 143). There are, of course, also those who embraced Müntzer, like the burgomaster of Zwickau, Erasmus Stuler, who called Müntzer “a man characterized by his irreproachable conduct and his theological education” (p. 69), and Pastor Simon Haferitz, who cautioned Count Ernst von Mansfeld to be careful in his handling of Müntzer so that he not “struggle against God” (p. 126).

Other sources come from nearly incidental financial records. The reader learns, for example, that the executioner in Mühlhausen was paid six *groschen* to display Müntzer’s corpse near the entrance to the city (p. 263) and that a messenger earned ten *groschen* for delivering a letter concerning Müntzer to Elector Friedrich (p. 165). A plethora of correspondence and records from various town councils and local governmental officials, a few pieces of satirical poetry and Müntzer’s confession and revocation (which may or may not be correctly

attributed to M¹/₄ntzer) round out the collection.

While the accounts are mostly contemporaneous, many are from the decades following M¹/₄ntzer's death, and the first source included dates from the early eighteenth century. The editors justify their decision to include these later accounts by explaining that they present unusual variations of the M¹/₄ntzer legend and in some cases are likely based on eyewitness testimony (p. 28). M¹/₄ntzer stands at the center of the volume rather than the events in which he played a role, and more general source material about the Peasants' War is excluded (as the sheer volume of such reports would demand).

In general, this collection can be described as user-friendly. The texts are extensively annotated, and a modern German translation is provided alongside the texts in Latin and Czech. While many will still struggle with the early new High German, many of the most problematic orthographic idiosyncrasies and difficult expressions are dealt with in footnotes, repeatedly where necessary. There are cases, however, where one might wish for explanation which is lacking—for example, the term *Knappen* and variations of this word occur frequently without footnotes, leaving the reader to infer from context the intended meaning or forcing him to turn to other reference works. This particular term is especially difficult because the word means very different things in different contexts: it apparently refers in some variations to miners and in others to weavers (*Tuchknappen*). The editors use the term *Tuchknappen* in one document heading even though the excerpted passage refers only to *dy knappen*, suggesting that the reader would require clues from outside the passage to correctly determine the reference in each case (p. 95).

In other instances, it is hard to determine how the editors decided where to include an explanatory footnote. For example, a footnote explaining the biblical significance of the rainbow depicted on the flag carried by the peasants comes not at the first mention of this symbol, but at a subsequent reference (pp. 205, 215). Similarly, a Latin passage that recurs in two of the sources is translated with slight variations, and the second rather than the first translation receives explanatory footnotes, which are completely absent from the first passage (pp. 86, 97).

A further highlight is the foreword for the series, published here because this volume, though the third and final volume in the planned *Thomas-M¹/₄ntzer-Ausgabe*, was the first of the three to be ready for publication. In it, Helmar Junghans, the editor of the series, outlines the

evolution of M¹/₄ntzer studies and the previous editions' shortcomings, which necessitated a new edition. Though Günther Franz published M¹/₄ntzer's collected works in 1968 (after a delay caused by the loss of a print-ready manuscript in World War II), the texts Franz included were sufficiently incomplete and filled with mistakes that scholars quickly began to recognize the need for a new edition (p. 23). In 1984 plans for such an edition were laid, with publication intended to coincide with the celebration of M¹/₄ntzer's 500th birthday in 1989 (pp. 25-26). The collapse of the German Democratic Republic complicated the usual delays, so that publication was held up for a decade and a half. Despite the delay, scholars should nevertheless welcome this series, which seems likely to endure both based on the quality of the edition and the physical quality of the bound book itself.

This is not to suggest that this volume alone is self-contained. The editors themselves explain that they envision this edition in part as a counterbalance to more polemical texts about M¹/₄ntzer that have been published fairly recently elsewhere and are therefore not included in this collection (p. 28). The pamphlets generated in the Wittenberg theologians' campaign against M¹/₄ntzer played a critical role in the development of the M¹/₄ntzer legend, so historians must examine those documents as well in their study of M¹/₄ntzer and the reception of his ideas.[1] Thus this volume provides only part of the picture, even more so considering the inherent bias of written sources against those classes least able to record their thoughts for posterity, a bias especially problematic when dealing with a popular figure like M¹/₄ntzer.

Despite the generally user-friendly nature of the volume, there is room for potential improvement. The source material is organized chronologically based on the events described in each document, but since individual documents were wisely not chopped into pieces to conform to the chronology, there is considerable overlap. The heading of each document includes only the date of the source's origin, whereas adding an approximate date range of the events discussed within would have facilitated finding references to particular events. The index of names and places will serve this function to some extent, since the reader can look up relevant proper nouns, assuming she knows what these are.

Some of the improvements one might suggest may in fact be planned for inclusion in one of the other volumes. For example, a basic timeline of M¹/₄ntzer's life and a biographical sketch would make it much easier for the

non-expert reader to navigate and make sense of the collection of source material here. Since in most cases, however, this book will be destined to stand in library shelves alongside its two companion volumes, the editors may have decided to include such biographical information in volume one, which will consist of M ntzer's own writings. (The second volume will include M ntzer's correspondence.) In some ways, such a timeline would have fit particularly well in the volume of third-person accounts, which is focused on M ntzer's activity rather than his thought.

If this book is appraised, however, as what it in-

tends to be—a collection of contemporary accounts of Thomas M ntzer intended for scholars in a variety of fields from Reformation history to hymnology and German literature—then it must be judged a success. While a few amendments would have made it somewhat more accessible for a wider audience, the framework one expects for a scholarly audience is present, and this audience will likely find it a useful reference for a long time to come.

Note

[1]. Ludwig Fischer, ed., *Die lutherischen Pamphlete gegen Thomas M ntzer* (T bingen: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1976).

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