

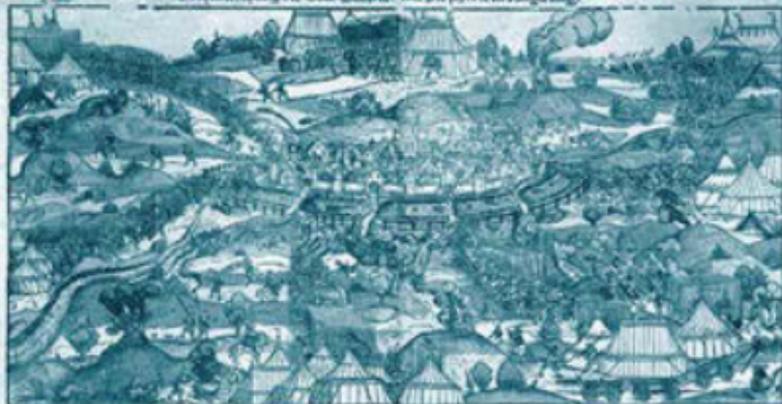
A History of the Münster Anabaptists

*Inner Emigration and
the Third Reich*

A Critical Edition of Friedrich
Reck-Malleczewen's *Bockelson:
A Tale of Mass Insanity*

Translated and Edited by
*George B. von der Lippe
and
Viktoria M. Reck-Malleczewen*

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**A HISTORY OF THE MÜNSTER
ANABAPTISTS**

**Other Work by Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen
in English Translation**

Diary of a Man in Despair

Other Books by George B. von der Lippe

Max Schmeling: An Autobiography (Edited and translated)

*The Figure of Martin Luther in Twentieth-Century German Literature:
The Metamorphosis of a National Symbol*

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A HISTORY OF THE MÜNSTER ANABAPTISTS

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2008 978-0-230-60547-3

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First published in 2008 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN™

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010 and
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England RG21 6XS
Companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978-1-349-37300-0 ISBN 978-0-230-61256-3 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9780230612563

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A history of the Münster Anabaptists : inner emigration and the
Third Reich / translated and edited by George B. von der Lippe and
Viktoria M. Reck-Malleczewen.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Anabaptists. 2. Germany—Church history—16th century.
3. Reck-Malleczewen, Fritz Percy, 1884–1945. Bockelson.
4. Beukelszoon, Jan, 1509–1536. I. Lippe, George B. von der.
II. Reck-Malleczewen, Viktoria.

BX4933.G3H57 2008

284'.309435614—dc22

2007045687

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: June 2008

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*This work is dedicated to the memory
of Dr. Leonard Paul Stoltz.*

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Acknowledgments

We would like to offer heartfelt thanks to Dr. Neil Donahue and Dr. Karl-Heinz Schoeps for making this project possible. We would also like to acknowledge Joseph Breault, whose technical expertise, good nature, and patience were indispensable; and many thanks as well to Mark Stoltz.

In Münster we would especially like to thank Irmgard Pelster of the Münster City archives and Ursula Grimm of the Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte.

And finally, we want to express our grateful appreciation to Saint Anselm College for its generous support of this project.

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Translator's Preface

Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen was born on August 11, 1884 into a family of East Prussian landed gentry (Junkers) on the estate Gut Malleczewen, the only remainder of which is a small cemetery in what is today Elk, Poland. From his early memories he wrote that “home . . . was those lonely estates, the broad snowfields, crystal blue lakes in the jewels of autumn—golden beech forests, November fogs. . . . Those expansive plains between the mountain ranges which stretch from the Urals down to Eastern Prussia are desolate, sparsely populated, and filled with demons and dusky gods. Western Germans, even those from just west of the Weichsel (Vistula) River, will never understand this world” (Irmgard Reck-Malleczewen, 21, our translation). For Reck, East Prussia would always be a realm unto itself, at once German and Slavic.

Although family expectations were for him to enter the military or political realm, young Reck's greater interest was for music, and he later studied medicine at the Universities of Königsberg and Innsbruck. He then worked a stint as a ship's doctor, which would give him material for later travel novels. Thereafter he began devoting the majority of his professional life to journalism, while music and the study of history were lifelong passions that would always occupy a portion of his time.

Reck moved south and continued to pursue his literary career as a theater critic for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Stuttgart. In 1925 he acquired the estate Poing bei Truchtlaching in the Bavarian Chiemgau region, where he would remarry in 1935 and start a second family of three daughters.¹ Writing, much of which were travel and adventure novels as well as some historical novels (a body of work largely written off by critics as so-called *Trivialliteratur*), was his occupation during the Weimar Republic (1918–1933) and the years of the Third Reich (1933 to his death at Dachau concentration camp in 1945).

Reck was most certainly a conservative, indeed, an outspoken monarchist and self-styled aristocrat² (which did not endear him in every quarter) who felt the ill-fated Weimar Republic to be a political mistake, yet who after 1933 came to realize that Hitler's Third Reich would be so much worse—a fatal, all-encompassing disaster of immeasurable proportions. In 1933 Reck converted to Catholicism, which he felt to be “the last bulwark against society's increasing coarsening and loss of individuality” (Reck, *Bockelson*, 24, our translation). The intensity of Reck's complete disdain for Hitler and the Nazi regime and the boldness with which he openly expressed it would only increase in direct proportion to the increase of repression and atrocities within the Third Reich.

In a review of the 2000-edition English translation of Reck's *Diary of a Man in Despair*, Jason Cowley wrote of Reck-Malleczewen: “A cultural conservative, monarchist, snob and extreme pessimist, Reck is a man out of a time, at once listlessly estranged from German modernity and mournfully engaged with it. His prose has a superb *hauteur* and he addresses the world out of the absurd aristocracy of his background. . . . He despises industrialism, mass-man and the ‘termite-heap’ society, Prussian militarism, the new ‘Business German’ spoken by the swarming hordes in Berlin, ‘processed food’ and the petty bureaucrats of Nazism. . . . But, above all, he despises Adolf Hitler. . . .” (Cowley, 53–54). This is indeed a unique individual who, in writing and publishing *Bockelson* while remaining in Nazi Germany, aimed and landed a direct literary blow to the Adolf Hitler whom he loathed beyond all else.

Reck's “prose of superb *hauteur*” often presents one with a challenging read, and it is an even more challenging undertaking for the translator who attempts to retain Reck's style of overwrought and elitist nineteenth-century prose, while at the same time investing the work with the requisite clarity for an English-language reader of the twenty-first century. Though relatively unknown, Reck-Malleczewen's name fits prominently into the phenomenon in German literary and cultural history that was only later given the name *Inner Emigration*. Inner emigrants were writers, artists, and scholars from everywhere across the political spectrum, who remained in Germany during the Third Reich and sought to express varying degrees of protest to the Hitler regime.³

To better explain Reck and his work within the context of Inner Emigration, it is best to pose a few questions. How much of Reck's Bockelson figure can be ascribed to Reck's hatred of Adolf Hitler? What literary techniques did Reck use to establish parallels between

Bockelson/Münster and Hitler/Third Reich such that *Bockelson* would be published (it was, if only briefly) while keeping himself out of harm's way (which ultimately he could not do)?

The first consideration—the relationship of Reck's Bockelson figure to Adolf Hitler—is best addressed by consulting Reck's diary; covering the period from August 11, 1936 to October 1944, it was first published in 1947 and translated into English in 1970. One need not read far to find definitive statements with respect to Hitler: "I saw Hitler last in Seebruck, slowly gliding by in a car with armor-plated sides . . . : a jellylike, slag-gray face, a moonface into which two melancholy jet-black eyes had been set like raisins . . . What I saw gliding by there . . . like the Prince of Darkness himself . . . was no human being" (*Diary*, 22–23). Compare a description of Hitler contained in the April 1939 entry of Reck's *Diary* with a Bockelson description, already published in 1937:

But Bockelson? His are the blurred and gelatinous features of a bastard born in a roadside ditch, of the barkeep and pimp . . . (*Bockelson*, 12)

I examined [Hitler's] face through my binoculars. The whole of it waggled with unhealthy cushions of fat; it hung, it was all slack without structure—slaggy, gelatinous, sick." (*Diary*, 75)

The parallels between Reck's Bockelson and Hitler are clear and unmistakable.

In that the majority of Reck's diary was written *after* the completion and publication of *Bockelson*, it would appear that the Bockelson and Hitler figures were interchangeable for Reck—a single personification of evil whom Reck had openly presented to a German readership with the 1937 publication of *Bockelson*. In his *Diary* entry for September 9, 1937 Reck writes: "My friends have taken the occasion to give me warning about my own writings . . . Night after night, I hide this record deep in the woods on my land . . . constantly on the watch lest I am observed, constantly changing my hiding place" (*Diary*, 42).⁴ Hence, a great deal of that journal's content which Reck felt the need to hide "night after night" would have already been reviewed by Nazi censors and published as the political-historical roman à clef, *Bockelson: Geschichte eines Massenwabms*.

Reck's means of getting his text published fall into several basic categories. First there is Reck's primary layer of historical cover: Bockelson's reign over the Münster Anabaptist community of 1534–1535 is the perfect metaphor, as the average person knew little or nothing about it; a secondary layer is afforded by the French

Revolution, about which Reck knew a great deal; further layers consist of historical figures and events from numerous times and places. In short, *Bockelson* abounds in historical red herrings whose often vague relevance to the text at hand could serve to distract and confuse even the most astute reader. Consider an example of a dangerously clear observation followed immediately by a questionably relevant statement concerning the French Revolution: “*Ein König aufrecht über alles. Ein Gott, ein Glaube, eine Taufe...*” (“One King upright above all. One God, one faith, one baptism”). And so we would appear to have come to a parallel with the French Revolution, at that juncture when the states are consolidated and when Napoleon settled in St. Cloud and Malmaison, and persecuted the Jacobins and called for the old emigrated aristocracy to return” (Reck, *Bockelson*, 127). Hence a telling blow is not left simply hanging in midair to be picked off by Nazi censors but is rather followed immediately by a flurry of almost non-sequitur details concerning the French Revolution.

The reader may also be drawn into a pastiche of obscure historical characters and then hit with another Bockelson-as-Hitler jibe, fortuitously attributed to someone else (i.e., Kerssenbroch): “Back then the memory of Karl von Luxemburg and the first Maximilian still lives on in their hearts and when we hear today the reports written around 1450 by lady-in-waiting Helene Kottaner about the crowning of a Hungarian King who was then but four weeks old, so the hymns to the mystical crowns of the Middle Ages still sing to us today. . . . But here fate would have it that someone born in a gutter grabs for the crown—a ‘theater king and commander of whores’ as Kerssenbroch so liked to call him. . . .” (Reck, *Bockelson*, 120–121) In this instance a series of somewhat interesting but ultimately confusing historical jabs allow Reck to land an unexpected and therefore all-the-more punishing shot at the Bockelson-Hitler figure.

Reck’s prose itself, at times academic and arcane, and at times appearing to be simply chaotic and labyrinthine, serves, at least initially, to deflect the notion that therein lies an abiding hatred of Hitler and the Third Reich. Seemingly pompous conventions such as Latin chapter titles,⁵ liberal sprinklings of Latin, French, and old *Plattdeutsch* (Lowland German), as well as numerous historical, literary, and biblical references, support the initial impression that *Bockelson* is nothing more than a scholarly treatise on a little-known incident in German history.

Equally important, *Bockelson* abounds with instances of anti-Bolshevist sentiments and jargon, all sincere expressions of monarchist Reck’s true feelings, yet which could only have improved *Bockelson*’s

chances of being published in the Third Reich of 1937. Consider the following masterstroke at the end of *Bockelson*, which was aimed at Hitler but could have been even more readily applied to Stalin: "It was not religious visions and hallucinations which motivated this first soviet republic, but rather...there was a great political gangster fanning the flames under his witches' cauldron..." (Reck, *Bockelson*, 203). It is indeed ironic that a consistent layer of generally anti-leftist and specifically anti-Bolshevist content would facilitate the publication of a work so brimming with hatred for the fascist Hitler and his regime.

We must ask as well, who was Fritz Reck-Malleczewen in 1937? He was certainly not Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, or Ernst Toller. The arbiters of Nazi culture were simply not expecting serious political protest from this lesser-known author of so-called *Trivialliteratur*. Those who might have been aware of Reck's ultraconservative politics would not have considered him likely to criticize Hitler or the Third Reich. Indeed, Reck's literary/political reputation—or lack of thereof—may well have helped get *Bockelson* by Nazi censors to whom our perspective of literary hindsight was not available.

Reck's tale of a late-medieval theocratic dictatorship was directed at Hitler and the Third Reich, yet it could apply to any number of demagogues and totalitarian regimes before or since the Nazis; and we of a certain age cannot help but think of Jonestown or David Koresh and the Branch Davidians.⁶ But isn't terror spawned by fundamentalist religion a fear with which we have all lived since that otherwise beautiful fall day of September 11, 2001? Reck's *Bockelson: A Tale of Mass Insanity* was written about a sixteenth-century nightmare of approximately eighteen-months duration and costing thousands of lives; but more essentially it was a literary weapon courageously aimed at an even more terrifying twentieth-century nightmare which lasted twelve years and cost millions of lives. Perhaps the great tragedy of Reck-Malleczewen's *Bockelson* is that it will no doubt *always* apply to numerous times and places.

Reading *Bockelson*, we can only marvel at Reck's historical and personal foresight—his vision took in and recorded not only that which had happened or was happening but also foreshadowed in Münster's collapse the fall of the Third Reich with all its consequences. At the outbreak of World War II, Reck wrote: "I have no doubt that immeasurable suffering is coming, and that it could not be avoided. But I also have no doubt about the thing that has sustained me for six years and maintained me in the darkest hours of my life... the certainty that today the great monster signed his own death

warrant" (*Diary*, 84). As the war escalated, Reck's journal entry for June 1941, foresees that "It is entirely possible . . . that I myself will be pulled by the eddies from this latest stroke of Hitler's genius, and dragged down" (*Diary*, 122).

It has always been thought that Reck died in February or March of 1945. Yet Nico Rost—also a prisoner at Dachau—tells in his diary entry for April 15, 1945 of a haunting encounter with another inmate:

Early this morning as I was at the desk waiting for today's death list—another two hundred names—a man spoke to me. He was about sixty, very nervous and totally exhausted. He was shaking and swaying, and his speech was so convoluted that at first, I really didn't know what he wanted. After a while I understood that he had been a patient but now had to be reassigned to his block. . . .

I asked him for his name. . . .

"Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen."

Immediately I asked, "Not the writer Reck-Malleczewen?"

He saw that I suddenly took greater interest in him.

"Yes, that's me, do you know my books? . . ."

An hour later. . .

When I think back now about my encounter [with Reck-Malleczewen], doubts start to arise. Surely this man's name was Reck-Malleczewen, but was he really the writer? Could it be that his instant, "Yes," to my question was simply a desperate grasp at what he hoped might be a straw that would save him? In any case, if he had tried to deceive me, I certainly forgive him. (Rost, 279–281, our translation)

In a tribute appearing in the 1946 and 1968 German editions of *Bockelson*, Reck's wife Irmgard tells of an end that should not have happened—which came in the very last days of the regime that Reck had consistently opposed:

His fate caught up with him shortly before the collapse of the regime. Some contemptible informer started the avalanche in motion. On the last day of December 1944 he was arrested and dragged off to Dachau. "A judgment? There is no judgment, since there is no crime," was the Gestapo's verbatim explanation to Reck's family. They learned that he was put into "special treatment," and in March the family was notified that he had already "died" in February. Some of his things were handed over to his wife. Much was missing, but there was a letter amongst them which showed that in the end he had been able to overcome hatred and bitterness—that "cancer of the soul" which had haunted

him all throughout the last years of his life—and to sacrifice his life for and to serve that which had always underlain his every endeavor. He closed the letter with: “If you want to honor my memory, repay evil with kindness, indeed, with active help.” (Irmgard Reck-Malleczewen, *Bockelson*, 27)

Reck's detractors—and there have been many—might do well to read *Bockelson* and reflect on the resolve with which he openly opposed unmitigated evil, as well as the courage with which he paid the ultimate price.

George B. von der Lippe

Notes

1. Reck and his first wife, Anna Büttner married in 1908 while Reck was still a university student. They shared a passionate love of music and had four children together but had been separated and then divorced for a number of years at the time he married Irmgard von Borke, the adopted daughter of a close friend.
2. Part of the role that Reck himself quite consciously chose to play was his transformation of the name Reck to a hyphenated “Reck-Malleczewen,” in support of the aristocratic image that he sought to project. In his *Diary* entry for July 25, 1944 he writes: “I derive from monarchical patterns of thinking. I was brought up as a monarchist, and continued existence of the monarchy is one of the foundation stones of my physical well-being” (*Diary*, 196).
3. An excellent collection of recent scholarship on Inner Emigration is to be found in the volume *Flight of Fantasy: New Perspectives on Inner Emigration in German Literature 1933–1945*, edited by Neil H. Donahue and Doris Kirchner.
4. Viktoria Reck-Malleczewen recalls being allowed once to accompany her father to bury his diary under a crabapple tree in an orchard on the Reck-Malleczewen property at Poing.
5. Chapter titles are given in English, with Reck's original Latin titles in parentheses.
6. Of the two cult tragedies, the episode of the Branch Davidians, where a compound in Waco Texas became a latter-day Zion of Münster under siege, resonates most strongly:

In addition to the public drama of a prolonged standoff, we have both parties refusing to negotiate for anything less than total surrender, . . . a final solution that was marked by unnecessary brutality, and the deaths of many people who had taken the wrong path, following the wrong man. The chief rebels, Jan van Leyden and Vernon Howell [David Koresh], were both self-created young men who changed their identities; both saw

themselves in the form of the biblical David; both usurped the authority of the previous prophet; both lacked formal education but had a thorough knowledge of the Bible and complete recall of it; both were talented performers with a marked artistic bent; both took more wives than the law, secular or religious, allowed; both were cunning, unscrupulous, and, in Jan's case at least, murderous; and both were capable of inspiring great affection despite all that was known to be reprehensible about them. (Arthur, 199)

Conservative Opposition: Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen's Antifascist Novel *Bockelson: A History of Mass Hysteria*

Karl-Heinz Schoeps

For authors of *inner emigration* it was not possible to comment with impunity on the contemporary political situation within the Third Reich using contemporary subjects. Therefore, authors were forced to find modes of indirect critique that would, first, avoid censorship and reprisal, and second, deliver critical commentary staking out positions at odds with state ideology, or at least allowing for an openness of interpretation, even if it at times amounted to inscrutability. One way to accomplish this sort of indirect critique was through “historical camouflage,”¹ that is, by using the past to illuminate the present. One of the best examples of this technique is Reinhold Schneider’s *Las Casas before Charles V* (*Las Casas vor Karl V*, 1938). Another method of critical indirection (and here, dislocation) was to use exotic lands as the setting, as did Werner Bergengruen in his novel *The Supreme Dictator and the Court* (*Der Grosstyran und das Gericht*, 1935), Ernst Juenger in his novel *On the Marble Cliffs* (*Auf den Marmorklippen*, 1939), or Ernst Wiechert in his short novel *The White Buffalo* (*Der Weisse Büffel*, 1937, first published in 1946). Though less well known than all of these other authors in *inner emigration*, the Protestant East Prussian turned Catholic Bavarian monarchist Friedrich Percyval Reck-Malleczewen (1884–1945) used the historic Anabaptist rule of 1534–1535 in the city of Münster to present the most trenchant criticism of National Socialist rule to appear in print in those years within Germany.

In 1533, four hundred years before the Nazis came to power in Germany and in the wake of Martin Luther’s reformation, the Westphalian city of Münster experienced increasing inner turmoil

that threatened to erupt into civil war. Lutheranism had reached Münster in the early 1530s as it had all other German lands, but neither Catholicism nor Lutheranism was firmly in control in the city. Under the leadership of Bernhard Rothmann, who had the support of the guilds, the Reformation was officially recognized in the Treaty of Dülmen in February of 1533 (after an attack on the episcopal court in Telgte in 1532). Soon the Lutherans who dominated the city council set out to secure the Reformation. But this was only the beginning of the bloody struggle that was to rage in Münster for the next two years. For Rothmann, the city reformer, Luther's reform did not go far enough; he wanted to introduce what he perceived as true Christianity in Münster. At issue were communion (Rothmann favored Zwingli's "that means the body of Christ" vs. Luther's "that is the body of Christ") and Baptism (Rothmann opposed the baptism of children, thereby turning against the prevailing law of the land "geltendes Reichsrecht"). He and his followers challenged the city council and, after three fierce clashes, gained a majority in the council elections of February 23, 1534. To quote Hans-Jürgen Goertz, an authority on the age of Reformation: "The Anabaptists therefore gained power legally by successfully exploiting an unstable situation where Lutheran and Zwinglian tendencies were unsetting against each other over the Reformation, and guilds were struggling for control of the council" (Goertz, 30). The Anabaptist movements were by no means restricted to Münster but found adherents and prophets in all German lands. Some were more radical than others, some were more militant than others. All of them, however, thought they were the chosen few and all of them were more or less brutally persecuted.

However, it was only in the city of Münster that they gained power for a short while—16 months, to be exact, from February 23, 1534 to June 25, 1535, when Münster was recaptured by imperial troops. One of the better-known Anabaptist prophets, Melchior Hoffmann . . . had selected the city of Strasbourg as the new Jerusalem. Instrumental in gaining power in Münster were prophets from abroad and their followers, notably Jan Matthijs (or Mathtys), a baker from Leiden and one of Hoffmann's disciples, who had arrived in Münster in February 1534 and, in particular, Jan van Leiden, also called Bockelson (after his father Bockel), an actor, playwright, and tailor who had quit his professions to open a bar. Their teachings appealed particularly to women (Ranke, 541), who played an important part in Matthijs's and Bockelson's ascension to power. But Münster was not enough for their ambition. According to Johan Dusentschnuer, one

of the new prophets and Bockelson's official spokesman or, in modern terms, "propaganda minister," the Anabaptist revolution should spread throughout the world: "As Johan Dusentschnuer proclaimed, the renewal of the world should issue from Münster" (Klötzer, 165). Münster figured as the center of salvation for the whole world (the "salvational center of the imminent renewal of the world," Klötzer, 160). Missionaries were sent into surrounding cities to proselytize their citizens.

When Jan Matthijs died on Easter in 1534 in a fight with imperial troops who beleaguered the city, Jan van Leiden succeeded him as leader. Proclaimed king of the city by Dusentschnuer, he erected a theocratic dictatorship, ruthlessly persecuting all enemies. Bockelson abolished the city council and replaced it with a council of twelve elders. Catholic icons were destroyed and pictures, books, documents, and even musical instruments were burned in the marketplace; only the Bible was spared and became the sole ideological guide for the community. Dissidents were either killed or forced to leave town; their belongings were confiscated and became communal property. New laws were introduced that abolished private property and sanctioned polygamy. All valuable metals were confiscated. However, not all of these measures were introduced for purely ideological reasons as Hermann von Kerksenbroch, one of the first and contemporary chroniclers of Anabaptist rule in Münster, claimed (Laubach, 194). According to Ernst Laubach, there was also a military necessity for this measure as the city came under increasing pressure from Bishop Count Franz von Waldeck's forces (Laubach, 184). Metals were needed for defensive purposes, social tensions had to be reduced by abolishing private property, and since women outnumbered men by a vast margin, polygamy seemed to make some sense; it was not done for the personal pleasure of the chief prophet Bockelson, at least not primarily (as Kerksenbroch maintained). The leveling of church spires was not wanton destruction but was carried out to create effective platforms for defensive weaponry and observation posts.

A new city ordinance made the respected citizen and merchant Knipperdolling, who was Bockelson's right-hand man, the official "bearer of the sword," in other words police chief of Münster (not executioner, as Kerksenbroch would have it). Bockelson was a gifted orator and had the support of the majority of the citizens. His claim to be a divinely selected leader was bolstered by his military victories against the sieging forces and by the failure of an ill-prepared coup against him. Bockelson saw himself as a "King on David's throne" whose mission was to prepare the millennium rule of Christ. When

the military situation deteriorated after the Bishop's forces had effectively blockaded the city and gained the upper hand, Bockelson emphasized the need for sporting events and games to divert people from the grim realities of hunger, destruction, and the daily chores of keeping up the defenses, a task to which every citizen, whether male or female, young or old, had to contribute. Draconian punishments were meted out for traitors and defeatists. Up to the very end Bockelson and his followers hoped that new weapons and a reserve army of Anabaptists from the Netherlands would change the desperate military situation and lead to final victory. But that was not to be; Bockelson's theocratic dictatorship finally failed. The Bishop's forces finally captured the city at great cost to attackers and defenders alike. Rothmann died in the final battle (or possibly escaped, according to Dülmen, 354), Bockelson and Knipperdolling were captured, interrogated, tortured, executed, and their bodies displayed in iron cages suspended from the tower of the Lamberti church. Münster was again saved for Catholicism (and has remained Catholic to this day).

This then is the historical background for Friedrich Percyval Reck-Malleczewen's chronical of the Anabaptist rule in Münster, *Bockelson: A History of Mass Hysteria*, which was published inside Germany in 1937. Reck-Malleczewen followed the historical events very closely and used a number of sources including Kerksenbrock and Gresbeck, both eyewitnesses of the events in Münster (albeit with a bias against the Anabaptists), as well as the eminent nineteenth-century historian Leopold Ranke. To lend an air of historical authenticity to his work Reck-Malleczewen quotes liberally from his sources in Latin and low German. He uses footnotes and a bibliography citing his sources. Ranke had postulated that history be studied objectively and "sine ira et studio," that is, without anger and passion. Reck-Malleczewen, in his chronicle, followed the opposite path (i.e., "cum ira et studio"). But Reck-Malleczewen's intention was not to achieve historical objectivity. On the contrary, he openly criticizes Ranke for his misplaced objectivity and asserts: "The times of wanting to understand at any price are gone until further notice. In writing history as well" (136). In searching for a convenient vehicle to publish his criticism of the Nazis within Nazi Germany, Reck-Malleczewen chanced upon the Anabaptist rule in Münster.² In this context objectivity and understanding were the last things he needed; both were replaced by attack and polemics. The subject matter Reck-Malleczewen selected for his attack on National Socialism was cleverly chosen because the Anabaptist rule in Münster in the sixteenth century provided, indeed, a number of striking parallels to Nazi rule in Germany in the twentieth