

‘Presents for Comrade Stalin’

The Thomas Müntzer archive in the Russian State Library, Moscow

As many Müntzer scholars will know, in 1949 the regional government of Saxony in the DDR sent a package of Müntzer’s original handwritten letters and writings to Moscow, as a 70th birthday present for Josef Stalin. Since that time, it has been extremely hard for non-Russian researchers to access those documents, now held in the archive of the Russian State Library – the more so now, since 24 February 2022. By good fortune, however, a researcher in Russia has provided a link to the catalogue of these documents, details of which are set out below.

The events surrounding the giving of that present in 1949, and subsequent attempts to repatriate the contents, have been amply described by the late Dr. Manfred Kobuch, not least in his essay ‘Der beschwerliche Weg von Thomas Müntzers Briefwechsel aus Dresden nach Moskau’ (‘Festschrift für Botho Brachmann’, Berlin 2005, pp.615-622). For those readers who do not have access to this illuminating essay, the following summary will suffice.

After Müntzer’s capture and death in 1525, such letters and documents as were found in his satchel and in his rooms in Mühlhausen were appropriated either by Philipp von Hessen (and taken to Kassel) or by Herzog Georg von Sachsen (and taken to Dresden). In Dresden, the collection passed through the care of a number of archivists, and were generally described as ‘Alte Briefe und Zettel [...] Thomas Müntzer[s]’. Almost miraculously, the Dresden archive survived the entire course of the Second World War and in particular the carpet bombing of the city. During Soviet occupation and then under the Saxon regional government of the SED, the archive came under the direction of Prof. Dr. Hellmut Kretzschmar.

On 15 November 1949, Kretzschmar hosted an official visit from two members of the Saxony government – Helmut Holtzhauer, Minister for Education (Volksbildung), and Gerhart Ziller, Minister for Industry and Transport. Three days later, Holtzhauer phoned to ask for photocopies of all the Müntzer documents; and this was swiftly followed by a Saxony Cabinet decision to send the originals to Moscow for Stalin’s birthday. Kretzschmar was, understandably, appalled at this proposal, and protested in strong language to Holtzhauer; he suggested that such an act would go against all internationally recognised protocols and be criticised all over the world. It did little good. The archivist then had to salvage what he could, by having the documents typed out verbatim (with the exception of the Czech version of the ‘Prague Manifesto’) and high-resolution photographs made (these were not available to anyone until 1953). A last-ditch attempt by Kretzschmar to ask that the copies be sent and the originals retained fell on deaf ears. The documents were shipped off to Moscow in an impressive new cover. The dedication read: ‘To the Friend of the German People, the Wise Leader of the Soviet People, on his 70th birthday. 21 December 1949. From the Regional Government of Saxony in the German Democratic Republic.’ (The fact that Stalin lied about his age, as about so many other things, did not affect the spirit of comradeship and obsequiousness in which the present was given. Stalin was in fact born on 18 December 1878.)

Stalin was no doubt delighted with the present, and he stored it in his own private library. After his death in 1953, the Müntzer archive were removed from Stalin’s library and sent over to the “V. I. Lenin” library in Moscow, now the Russian State Library. Dr. Kobuch received permission to view the archive in Moscow in 1987; and in 1989, some of the documents returned briefly to Germany, on loan – and were swiftly taken back to the Soviet Union. In December 1989, an attempt by the late Dr. Siegfried

Bräuer to use the influence of the DDR Minister for Culture to ask for the archive to be returned, failed – partly due, no doubt, to more pressing issues for both the DDR and the Soviet Union. And so the archive remains in Moscow.

Contact from Russia

In May 2022, the present author was surprised to receive an email from a scholar in Russia, who wished to have some bibliographical details for a letter written by Johann Agricola to Thomas Müntzer at the start of 1521. This is letter No. 30, in Volume II of the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* of Müntzer's works (Leipzig 2010). I supplied my correspondent with the relevant information copied from the *Gesamtausgabe*; and he replied by providing a website link to that part of the online catalogue of the Russian State Library in Moscow which details the full contents of the collection gifted to Stalin. This document is a minor delight. The reader can access it, either online at Moscow, or a copy of it on my own website (see below). Set out below is a transcription of the detailed catalogue, translated into English/German.

One curiosity of the catalogue is the mixture of typewritten and handwritten notes. The handwritten notes (all in Roman lettering) are not just extra comments, since spaces have been left in the typed text for these notes to be inserted. Book-titles are written in, but the page-references within that book are typewritten. Were the page-references provided by Dresden in 1949? Names of people are often – but not always – given in Russian and then repeated in a handwritten version. All the handwritten annotations are in German or Latin. The mixture of text is plausibly a result of there being no typewriter available in Moscow with a Roman-alphabet keyboard. The person who wrote the additional words was probably not a native German speaker, as is evident from some of the curious spellings; but whoever it was, they did have some background knowledge of 16th century Germany.

The original catalogue entries can be viewed online at:

<https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/rsl01004834680?page=1573&rotate=0&theme=white> for the index entry (fifth line) and

<https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/rsl01004834680?page=2281&rotate=0&theme=white> and subsequent as far as p.2297, for the details.

The detailed document is also accessible at:

[https://www.andydrummond.net/muentzer/PDFs/Russian State Library listing of TM holdings.pdf](https://www.andydrummond.net/muentzer/PDFs/Russian%20State%20Library%20listing%20of%20TM%20holdings.pdf)

Notes on the transcription

In the transcription below, *anything in italics* is handwritten on the original document, the rest being typewritten. Only the Russian text has been translated; words in Latin and German have been left as they are in the original.

The archive catalogue consists of an introduction (pp.314-315) and then a detailed list (pp.315-322), which is itself divided into four sections:

- I. Letters by/from Müntzer (16 items)
- II. Works and notes of Thomas Müntzer (14 items)
- III. Letters to Thomas Müntzer (27 items)

IV. Letters and manuscripts from/by various others (12 items)

Within each section, every item is numbered sequentially, and the relevant folio number (originating in the Dresden archive) is given, along with a brief description. Sometimes the description has been annotated in handwriting with further detail.

For simplicity, the detailed descriptions of the items have been presented in a table. The first three columns of the table contain the words and reference numbers from the catalogue. Two additional columns have been added for this analysis: the first provides a cross-reference to the relevant item in volume I, II or III of the Leipzig *Thomas Müntzer Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (in the format: Volume\Item-number). In a small number of cases, where a cross-reference could not be found, I have provided an equivalent in the Franz (1968) edition of Müntzer's writings. In the final column are the Moscow archive's notes on the physical condition of the item, as per the introductory text above.

Any obvious errors or discrepancies have been highlighted in the footnotes.

In the column "KGA" and in the footnotes below, the following acronyms are used:

- **KGA** = **Thomas Müntzer Ausgabe: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Volumes I to III, Leipzig 2004-2017).**
- **MSB** = **Thomas Müntzer: Schriften und Briefe, ed. G. Franz (Gütersloh 1968)**
- **ABKG** = **Felician Gess (ed.), Akten und Briefe zur Kirchenpolitik Herzog Georgs von Sachsen. I und II (Leipzig 1905/1917)**
- **WA** = **Martin Luther, Weimarer Ausgabe (Weimar)**

Transcription of the catalogue

The first page of the catalogue extract consists of a dark cover with a handwritten label. The label reads:

F[onds]. 218
Department of Manuscripts
Collection
V[ol].1 NN[os]. 7-119
Classification Gr[oup]

The next two pages (from the words "No. 390" on p.314 to the penultimate line on p.315) are physical descriptions of the volume and its contents, as follows:

№ 390. WORKS AND CORRESPONDENCE OF THOMAS MUNTZER, presented as a gift to J. V. Stalin on his seventieth birthday on 21 December, 1949, by the government of the state of Saxony.

Manuscripts from the 16th century, in Latin and German. Latin and Gothic cursive writing.

74 documents, 177 sheets / [of which] 75 blank/ - 106 sheets / [of which] 5 blank/ + 70 blank sheets of the album, into which are interleaved all the documents + 1 title

page.¹ The documents vary in size; the size of album itself is 36.5 x 23.5 [cms].
 Pagination of the documents and the sheets album is separate. Binding is cardboard with white leather. The boards are embossed in gold [with the words]: “*Thomas Müntzer – Briefe*”

Printed on the title page in two colours: “*Dem Freund des deutschen Volkes, dem weisen Führer des Sovietvolkes zu seinem 70. Geburtstag 21. Dezember 1949. Deutsche demokratische Republik Landesregierung Sachsen.*”

Folios 1-1a are old cover pages of the cases in which documents were stored with headings from the 17th century.

Most of the documents have been restored. Folio 1 is torn at the bottom, Folio 1a is torn on the fold, ...

[Author’s note: the remainder of this paragraph – from the third-from-last line on p.314 – are notes about any physical damage to numbered folios. For simplicity, these notes have been included verbatim in the ‘Reported Condition’ column in the detailed table below.

After line 16 on p.315, the description continues ...]

The documents were previously stored in the Dresden archive, the numbering of the sheets was done there, most of the documents were published in the book: “*Briefwechsel von Thomas Müntzer*” hrsg. von Boemer [sic] und Kirn, Leipzig 1931 u. Seidemann “*Thomas Müntzer. Eine Biographie*”, Dresden u. Leipzig, 1842.

Some of the publications appear in the book “*Otto Brandt. Thomas Müntzer. Sein Leben und seine Schriften.*” Jena, 1933.

In all publications, reference is made to the sheet numbers of the Dresden archive.

The collection contains

I Letters [by/from] Thomas Müntzer

Item	Folio	Description	KGA	Reported Condition
1	4	To Ambrosius Emmen, / <i>Ambrosius Emmen</i> / Sept. 3, 1524. Published: <i>Briefwechsel</i>	II\102	
2	7-8; 42-43	To Martin Luther, July 9 /1523/. <i>Briefwechsel</i> , pp.42-44 Martin Luther, July 13, 1520. <i>ibid</i> , pp.11-14	II\57 & II\21	Folio 7 is frayed at the edge, torn at bottom. Folio 8 is torn and glued. Folio 42 torn at the bottom. Folio 43 with cuts at the bottom.

¹ This is confusing, but seems to mean is that the 74 archival items are presented on 106 sheets, and that these are interleaved with 75 blank pages. It should also be noted that folios 11, 18, 82 and 84-85 are not mentioned in the detailed list below: these are presumably the ‘5 blank sheets’ mentioned in this description.

3	21	To Mark Thomas, with the alias Stübner / <i>Mark Thoma, gen. Stübner</i> / - June 15, 1521 ibid pp.22-23	II\35	
4	24	To Andreas Karlstadt / <i>Andreas Carolostadius</i> /, July 29, 1524. ibid, p.46	II\61	Folio 24 is torn at the seal.
5	26	To an unidentified person, no date. ibid, pp.35-36	II\62 & II\70	Folio 26 is torn at the bottom edge and a rectangular piece without text is cut out at the bottom right.
6	27	To the citizens of Allstedt, August 15-24, 1524. ibid, pp.87-89	II\98 & II\99	
7	30	To an unidentified person in Allstedt, after August 15, 1524. ibid pp.105-107	II\109 & I\25	
8	31	To an unidentified person, March 19, 1523. ibid pp.40-41	II\55	Folio 31 has holes in the folds.
9	33	To an unidentified person /apparently contemporaries/ July 14, 1522. ibid, pp.37-38	II\48	Folio 33 - edges are frayed.
10	36	To Mikael Gans / <i>Michael Ganss</i> /, June 15, 1521. ibid, pp.24-25	II\38 & I\31	
11	47	Akatziu Glor / <i>Achatius Glor</i> /, January 3, 1520. ibid, pp.7-8	II\17	Folio 47 is torn at the bottom.
12	51-54	To [his] father – excerpt from a letter, undated. ibid, pp.14-15	II\32 & I\33	Folios 51 and 54 are stained.
13	69	To an unidentified person, undated. Begins: <i>Pax et gaudiam in spiritus sancti ...</i>	I\29 & I\36	
14	73	To an unidentified person – a Franciscan – a draft of a letter. 1520. Begins: <i>Reverende magister... confessoris Anthonii Paduani...</i>	II\1 & II\2	
15	80	To followers in Stolberg, without termination, July 18, /1523/. <i>Briefwechsel</i> , pp.44-45	II\59	
16	90	To Christoph Meynhard / <i>Christoferius Maynhard</i> / 11 December 1523. ibid, pp.52-54	II\69	

II Works of Thomas Müntzer and extracts in his own hand

Item	Folio	Description	KGA	Reported Condition
1	15	Müntzer, extracts from the Psalms, Latin, no date.	I\22	
2	22	Prayer, handwritten by Müntzer, German, no date. Begins: <i>Die fürsten haben mich on orsach verfolgt...</i>	I\20	Folio 22 - the bottom edge is wrinkled.
3	23	Extracts from the book of Diogenes Laertius <i>De moribus et vita philosophorum</i> Müntzer's handwriting, Latin, no date	I\32	Folio 23 is torn at the bottom.
4	28	Prague Manifesto, in the Czech version, modern list. Czech, no date. <i>Briefwechsel</i> , appendices, pp.150-154	I\12C	
5	35	Theses for disputation, compiled by Müntzer during his stay in Prague /1521 Sept ² / In Müntzer's handwriting, Latin. <i>ibid</i> , pp.138-139	I\11	
6	44	<i>Religionsachen betreffende die Menschwerdung christi</i> " /An excerpt concerning the earthly existence of Christ / In Müntzer's handwriting, German, undated. <i>Seidemann</i> , appendices 34, pp.140-141	I\26	
7	49-50	Explanation of Biblical names and words. In Müntzer's handwriting, Latin, undated.	I\23	
8	58-65	Office on the life of St Cyriacus, entitled <i>Ne errore de cipia</i> In Müntzer's handwriting, Latin, no date. At the end, a four-lined section with musical notes, /1 bar/ . ² Begins: <i>Adest nobis beati ciriaci festina</i>	I\9	Folio 58 is torn.
9	66-67	<i>Propositiones probi viri d. Egrani</i> – list of the proposals of Egranus, in Müntzer's handwriting, Latin. <i>Briefwechsel</i> , pp.135-138	I\10	
10	74-75	Sermon on the parable of the negligent servant, in Müntzer's handwriting, Latin, no date. <i>Briefwechsel</i> , appendices, 159-160	II\33 & I\15	
11	81	List of /books?/ in Müntzer's handwriting, Latin, no date. Begins: <i>De Joannita de prelati...</i> Written on the back of a letter from an unidentified person with a signature <i>Theodericus P ...</i>	I\35	
12	83	A note in the hand of Müntzer on the back of a sheet of paper written in another hand: <i>Non est</i>	I\16	

2 The meaning here is very obscure, but seems to refer to the layout of final page of the Cyriacus document.

		<i>amicus cesaris o vita reproborum quis vehementer teipsam diliges. Qui regem se facit condicit cesari.</i>		
13	86	List of /books by Greek authors?/ In Müntzer's handwriting, Latin, undated.	I\34	Folio 86 - the bottom right corner is torn.
14	91	Fragments of theological notes and liturgical notes in Müntzer's handwriting, Latin and German, b/d. a. /Outline of a sermon?/ Begins: <i>Es sol Rheyne gotformige lers czugelassen werden...</i> b. Begins: <i>Hec dies quam fecit dominus...</i> c. Begins: <i>O eniger gutiger Gott...</i> d. Begins: <i>Possessor Beucis [sic] 14 d exodi...</i>	I\28 I\19 I\30 I\24	Folio 91 the paper is yellowed.

III Letters to Thomas Müntzer

Item	Folio	Description	KGA	Reported Condition
1	2	From Christian Döring / <i>Kerstenu Doringe</i> / January 11, 1519. <i>Briefwechsel</i> pp.4-5	II\12	Folio 2 is torn at the bottom, at the seal there is a hole, with loss of text.
2	5	From Johann Buschmann / <i>Johannes Buschmann</i> / September 30, 1522. <i>ibid</i> , pp.38-39	II\50	Folio 5 is torn at the left side [where there is?] a rectangular piece without text.
3	6	From Martin Seligmann / <i>Martinus Seligkman</i> / March 13, 1524. <i>ibid</i> , pp.54-55	II\73	
4	12	From Franz Günther / <i>Franciscus Güntherus</i> / January 25, 1522. <i>ibid</i> , p.32	II\46	Folio 12 is torn at the bottom.
5	13	From Hans Lebe / <i>Hans Lebe der Pheme</i> / around June 15, 1521. <i>ibid</i> , pp.23-24	II\36	
6	14	From Johann von Weyda / <i>Johannes de Weyda</i> / 12 December, 1519. <i>ibid</i> , p.5	II\15	Folio 14 is torn at the bottom.
7	25 & 93	From Andreas Karlstadt / <i>Andreas Carolostadius</i> / /2/ dated December 21, 1522 and July 19, 1524 <i>ibid</i> , p.39 and pp.68-70	II\54 & II\86	Folio 25 is torn with the loss of text and restored. Folio 93 – edges are frayed and torn at the bottom.
8	29 ³ &	From Johann Agricola / <i>Job[ann] Agricola</i> / dated /April/ 1521 and November 2, 1520	II\30	Folio 29 is torn at the fold with loss of text.

	40	ibid, pp.21-22 and 15-16	II\23	Folio 40 a piece is cut out at the bottom left, without text, holes in the folds, ink stains, at the bottom left.
9	32	From Engelhard Mohr / <i>Engelbardius Mohr</i> / March 31, 1523. ibid, pp.41-42	II\56	
10	34	From Hans Sommerschuh / <i>Hans Sumerschuch</i> / July 31, 1521. ibid, pp.28-30	II\40	
11	37-38	From Hans Pelt / <i>Hans Pelt</i> / /2/ dated June 25 and September 6, 1521 ibid, pp.26-28 and 30-31	II\41	Folio 38 has holes in the folds.
12	39	From Moritz Reynhart / <i>Mauritius Reynhart</i> / 1520. ibid pp.17-18	II\26	
13	45	From Achatius Glor / <i>Achatius Glor</i> / 1520 /after January 3/ ibid pp.8-9	II\18	Folio 45 is torn at bottom.
14	46	From Johann Wildenauer / <i>Egranus</i> / Undated /before February 16, 1521/ ibid, pp.20-21	II\31	
15	48	From Matthaeus Volmar / <i>Matthaeus Volmar</i> / August 30, 1516 ibid, p.1	II\9	Folio 48 is crumpled and dirty.
16	56	From Heinrich von Büнау / <i>H. v. Bunaw</i> / April 21, 1520. ibid, p.9	II\19	
17	57	From Ludovic Wittehovet / <i>Ludolphus Wyttenhovet</i> / 1516 or 1517. ibid, pp.3-4	II\3	Folio 57 with yellow spots.
18	68	From the monks Goldschmidt, Veit and Martin Gentzel / <i>Goltschmidt, Vitus, Martinus, Gentzel</i> / 1521 /December?/	II\45 & I\21	Folio 68 is torn.
19	70	From Wolfgang Juche / <i>Wolfgang Juche</i> / July 26, 1524 ibid, p.77	II\94	
20	71	From the community of the Old Town of Frankenhausen, July 26, 1523 . ibid, pp.45-46	II\60	Folio 71 is torn.
21	72	From Johann Eschen / <i>Johann Esche</i> / undated ibid, pp.36-37	II\52	
22	76	From Scho[wester] Ursula / <i>Scho ... Ursula</i> / 1520 /After middle of May/ ibid, p.10	II\10	Folio 76 is torn at the folds and glued.

3 The Russian catalogue shows folio 24, but this must be wrong, as item 4 in the first section is also marked as 'folio 24'. KGA II\30 is marked as folio 29 – similarly in MSB\21.

23	77	From Johann Cap/ell/an / <i>Johann Caphan/</i> /1520, December?/ <i>ibid</i> , p.16	II\25	
24	78	From the rector / <i>Martinschule/</i> in Braunschweig /About end of June/ 1517. <i>ibid</i> , pp.1-2	II\11	Folio 78 is torn at the folds and glued.
25	79	From Klaus / <i>Clawes/</i> , servant of Hans Pelt, July 25, 1517. <i>ibid</i> , p.3	II\8	
26	89	From Hermann Ferber/ <i>Hermann Ferber/</i> June 6, 1520. <i>ibid</i> , p.10	II\20	
27	92	From Hans Puttiger / <i>Hannus Puttyger/</i> , undated <i>ibid</i> , pp.81-82	II\96	

IV Letters and manuscripts from/by various people

Item	Folio	Description	KGA	Reported Condition
1	3	To Frater Longinus R..... / <i>frater Longinus Ru..../</i> with the address: “/Egregio et egregissimo domino <i>Gordiano devoto et speculativo.../</i> June 24, 1520 / <i>feria XVII apud Wolffgangum /</i> Begins: “S. P. Reverende in xristo pater...”	II\26 Beilage	Folio 3 is torn at the bottom.
2	9-10	“Visions of the Liedersdorf Herold” /” <i>Dys sein die gesichte die der Vater gesehen hat, synt dem Thomas Müntzer außen ist gewesen/</i> ” Concerning this manuscript, see the notes on its publication in / <i>Briefwechsel/</i> pp.82-84	II\96 Beilage	
3	16-17	Record of instructions to Müntzer during his trip to Leipzig in June 1519. By the hand of Konrad Glitsch /, in German language / <i>Conrad Glitzsch</i> <i>ibid</i> , pp.129-130	I\38	
4	19	Letter from Dorothea Albrecht / <i>Dorede Albrechten/</i> to Georg Albrecht / <i>Georgio Alberti/</i> undated, German. Address and postscript in Müntzer’s handwriting. <i>Ibid</i> , p.18	II\13	Folio 19 is torn and stained.
5	20	Letter to Ambrosius Emmen / <i>Ambrosius Emmen/</i> From an unidentified person, undated, German. Begins: “ <i>Myn leber son du salt nysen...</i> ”	II\20 Beilage	Folio 20 - a piece without text is torn off at the bottom.
6	41	List /of people of the Reformation/ among them Müntzer and Pfeiffer, German, undated.	???	⁴

4 This could be document no. 1171 in ABKG, Volume II, pp.429-436 ?

		Judging by a later note, it was written in the hand of Duke George of Saxony		
7	55	“ <i>Antwort auff der spruch unusquisque vocatore...</i> ” Record of a discourse, in the hand of an unidentified person, German, no date.	I\18	
8	87	Note / 3 lines / in an unidentified hand, Latin, undated. Begins: “ <i>Petrus dattum argen...</i> ”	I\37	
9	88	Letter from Ambrosius Guterbach / <i>Ambrosius Guterbach</i> /. To Johann. Undated. Latin.	II\20 Beilage 2	
10	94-95	Lists of two letters from unidentified persons, fragments. One of them /f.95/ begins: /” <i>Durchlauchtige hoch ...</i> “/ Published in Stuttgart ⁵	???	Folios 94-95 – fragments of sheets, the text is partially preserved.
11	96	Extracts from /Luther's writings on the Eucharist/ In the hand of an unidentified person, Latin, undated.	MSB p.17 note 16 ⁶	
12	97-106	” <i>Thomas Müntzers Historie 1520</i> ” – Müntzer and pamphlet on him in verse, handwritten 16 th century, German. /Seidemann/ App.5, pp. 207-118	III\43 ⁷	Folios 97-106 eaten by worm. Many sheets are blackened on the folds and the reverse /the position of the address on the letters/.

The final line of text (p.322) reads :

“Received with an exhibition of presents to Comrade Stalin.”

5 The reference to a book published in Stuttgart is obscure. Was this note perhaps supplied by Dresden, along with the document? The first words cited are part of a usual address to a prince, so are not helpful in identifying the source. (But note that Wilhelm Zimmermann’s *Geschichte des grossen Deutschen Bauernkrieges* was published in Stuttgart.)

6 MSB p.17, footnote 16 suggests that this is an extract from Luther’s ‘Vom Anbeten des Sakraments des heiligen Leichnams Christi’ (1523, Latin translation 1526) – WA XI, pp.449-450.

7 KGA III\43 indicates folios 86-107, which must be incorrect – Russian catalogue shows 97-106, and already records other folios in the range 86 to 96.