

THE
MALLERBACH
CHAPEL
PAPERS

Documents relating to the events of 1524

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2025

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Allstedt Castle, as it is today

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Introduction

Thomas Müntzer arrived in the small Saxon town of Allstedt in April 1523. Here he pursued his ideas and actions for church reform with great vigour: preaching, writing and – most impressively of all – producing German-language Mass-books.

The sermons which Müntzer preached during his reformed services in the St Johannis church included attacks upon the existing Church institutions. Both he and his fellow preacher Simon Haferitz (at the church of St Wigberti) condemned the Cistercian Order which possessed several properties in the area. Even before Müntzer's arrival, the citizens of Allstedt had in 1523 refused to pay the customary tithe owed to the nearby Cistercian nunnery at Naundorf. This obviously did not go down well with the abbess, Sophia von Schaffstedt, who made strong and repeated representations to the Saxon overlords of Allstedt, Duke Johann and Prince Friedrich 'the Wise'; in the end Friedrich ordered the tithe to be paid. Which did not go down well in the town. Such was the spirit of anti-monasticism at the time that swift revenge was taken on the abbess and her nunnery. Sometime on 24 March 1524, the Mallerbach chapel, just outside Allstedt, and a place of pilgrimage in the care of the nunnery, was ransacked and set alight.

There is naturally some confusion about the events – those who took part could not be expected to give a faithful account, if any. But contemporary reports tell of a band of men arriving after dark and advising the elderly watchman to

take to his heels. The men then burned the chapel to the ground. The abbess immediately complained and Hans Zeiss, as the princes' local representative and steward of Allstedt castle, was obliged to investigate. A somewhat half-hearted inquiry followed, with Zeiss and the town officials returning the evasive verdict that 'persons unknown' had committed the criminal act. Their initial report even suggested rather boldly that it might have been agents of the abbess herself who had torched the place; this was later toned down to the less provocative suggestion that the culprits were probably not citizens of Allstedt. To add insult to injury, the abbess was accused of 'bringing out honey-sweet words that concealed in them bitter gall, as every Christian can judge' (see Document 4 below) – that is, of bringing a false suit against Allstedt in order to damage the church reform movement.

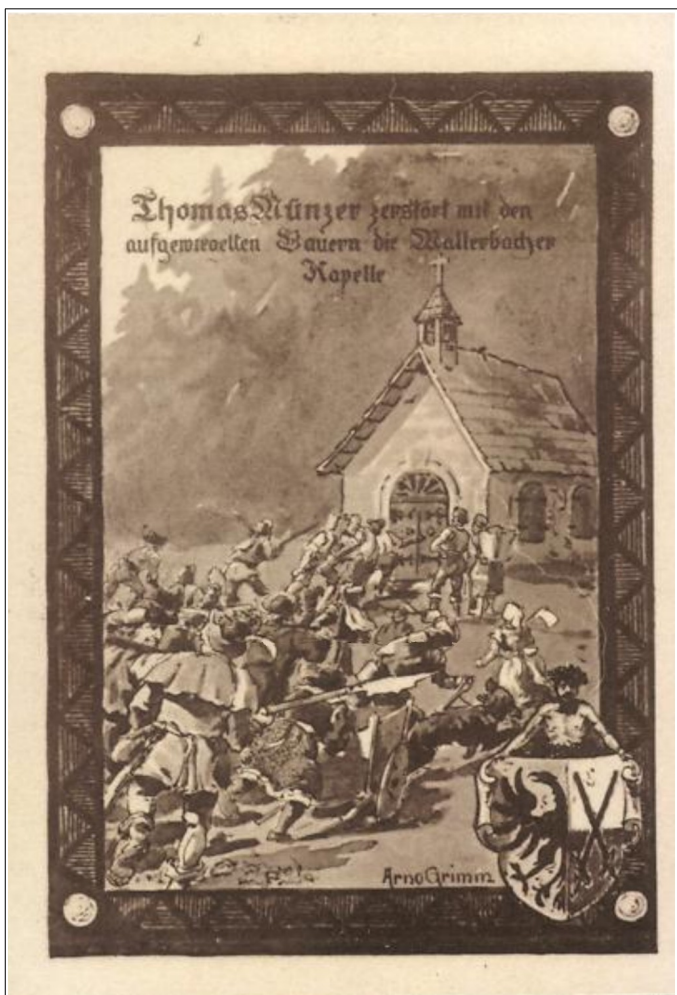
Relations between the nunnery and the town of Allstedt did not improve thereafter. In May 1525, when the peasant unrest in Thuringia was at its peak, and Naundorf's nunnery became a potential target for the rebel forces, the abbess complained bitterly that her requests for protection were effectively met with a shrug of the shoulders from Zeiss, who excused himself with the news that most of the men of Allstedt had joined the rebel army and so he had no protection to offer.¹

The question of precisely who was at the chapel on that dramatic day in March 1524 is, in the wider context, not an urgent one; what mattered was that the resulting investigation revealed a remarkably courageous stance on the part of the

1 See W. P. Fuchs & G. Franz, *Akten zur Geschichte des Bauernkrieges in Mitteldeutschland*, II, Aalen 1964, p.186

town-council and the people of Allstedt. Müntzer's sermons, and those of Haferitz, may well have encouraged the iconoclasm – and Duke Johann deeply suspected the former – but it is fascinating to see just how Zeiss and the town-councillors contrived to keep Müntzer out of the spotlight for a long time. And the actions of Hans Zeiss, the ducal representative, were curious indeed.

The entire story is both comic and fascinating, providing a real insight into the mechanics of the early, radical Reformation at ground level. More can be read about it in Andrew Drummond's book *The Dreadful History and Judgement of God on Thomas Müntzer* (London/New York 2024), or (in German) Lucas Wölbing's book *Müntzers langer Schatten*, Mühlhausen 2024.



The destruction of the Mallerbach, as imagined on a 'Notgeld' (emergency money) note, issued by the town of Allstedt in 1921. The text reads: 'Thomas Müntzer and the inflamed peasants destroy the chapel at Mallerbach.'

(Author's collection)

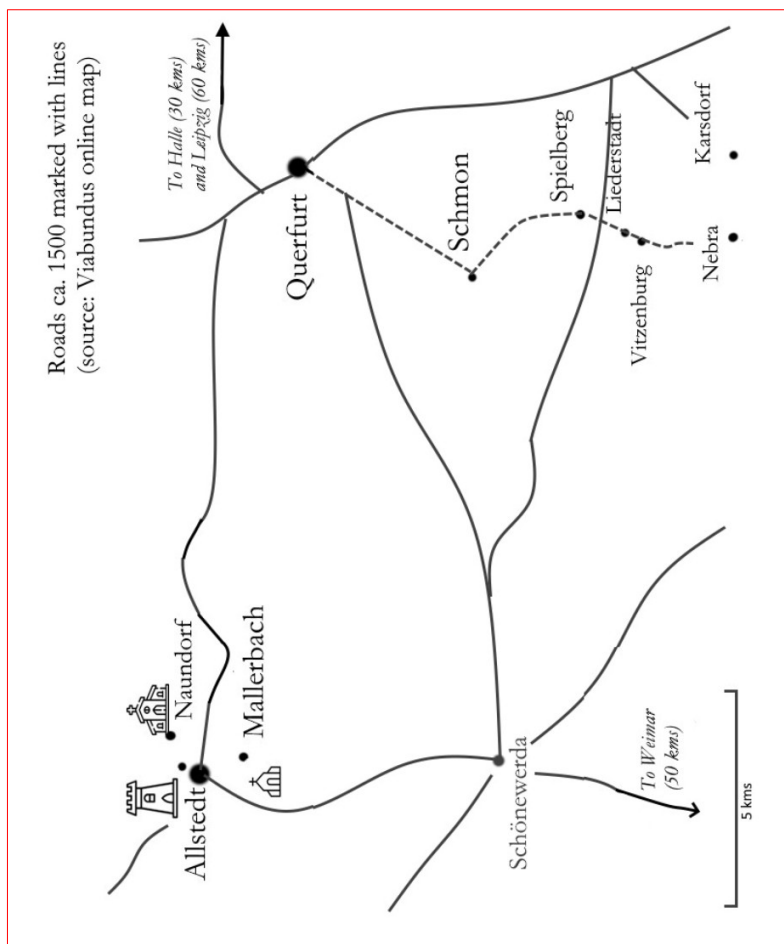
Maps and illustrations

The two maps on this page show the location of Allstedt within Germany. The sketch map overleaf focuses on the Allstedt area (outlined in red below), and shows the location of the various places mentioned in the documents.

Photos of the excavated chapel ruins, from 2024, are reproduced on page vii below.



On the sketch map below, the lines of the roads ca. 1500 have been marked (approximately) according to the maps created by the [Viabundus](#) project.



Ruins of the Mallerbach Chapel, 2024

© Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt, Robert Prust



Notes on the text and translations

Most of the documents included here are taken from the volume of letters in the most authoritative German edition of Müntzer's works – Volume II of the *Thomas Müntzer, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Leipzig 2010, edited by Siegfried Bräuer and Manfred Kobuch. One document is taken from Volume III of the same edition, Leipzig 2004, edited by Wieland Held and Siegfried Hoyer. The detailed bibliographical references at the start of each document are rendered as (e.g.) *ThMA 2, Anhang 2, pp. 510-11*, or *ThMA 3, pp. 151-6*.

The original 16th century texts reproduced in *ThMA* were translated into modern German by Lucas Wölbing; his modernised versions were then translated into English by Andrew Drummond (with further advice from Lucas).

Where there is dubiety about a particular word, or its meaning needs clarified, this will be provided in the footnotes, or within the text [in brackets, thus].

The following translations have been used consistently throughout:

- **Steward** for *Schösser*. This is the job-title of a steward, or bailiff, or tax-collector. Hans Zeiss occupied this position in Allstedt. Note that a *Vogt*, also mentioned in the documents, occupies a similar position, and has been translated as 'bailiff'.

- **Mayor** for *Schultheiss* – the mayor of Allstedt was Nikolaus Rucker. Hans Reichart and Hans Bosse were respectively *Bürgermeister* (also, loosely, ‘mayor’) and *Ratsmeister* (council leader)
- **Town-sergeant** for *Stadtknecht* – this is a man employed by the town to act as a policeman or armed guard. While ‘town-guard’ is probably a more accurate translation for *Stadtknecht*, it might mislead the reader into thinking it was a body of men; there was only one such person in Allstedt.
- **Gracious, most gracious, merciful etc** for *gnädig, gnädigst* – the honorific titles of the Duke and Prince of Saxony have been translated as ‘[most] gracious’ or ‘[most] merciful’. Note that Prince Friedrich of Saxony was an Elector to the Empire (*Kurfürst*); his younger brother Johann was a Duke (*Herzog*). Both are also frequently referred to as ‘His Grace’ or ‘Prince’, and not infrequently ‘Illustrious’ (*durchlaucht*).

[1]

**Joachim von Lichtenhain to the mayor and town-council of
Allstedt.**

Vitzenburg, 7th April 1524 ¹

ThMA 2, Anhang 1, pp. 509-10.

Honourable, wise and good friends, I place myself readily at your service.

I have read in your letter that I am supposed to have in my custody or prison someone who is accused of being involved in setting fire to the chapel at Mallerbach and thereby destroying it, and also in removing items from the chapel. Under my seal, I hereby report what I know of his theft. You should know that the information [that he is still held in my prison] is false, for he escaped when he was accused of this deed. But the things which were stolen by him were half of a censer and a missal. He calls himself Hans Pirner.

¹ Vitzenburg is located about 17 kms south-east of Allstedt

**Hans Schramm, burgher of Querfurt,¹ to the mayor and
town-council of Allstedt.**

8th April 1524

ThMA 2, Anhang 2, pp. 510-11.

Honourable, prudent and good friends, I place myself readily
at your service.

I have read in your letter that several people have dared to
destroy and burn down the chapel at Mallerbach, and remove
the things that lay within it and are now supposed to be
imprisoned in Schmon² and elsewhere. You asked me to
advise you in writing what I know of this. Therefore I now
inform you that I have heard rumours that a certain person,
named as Brambach from Spielberg,³ took a small bell home
with him. A lime-burner from Krautdorf near Liederstadt,⁴
who took a missal and other things, has fled. However,
Brambach was arrested on this account in Schmon. I do not
know whether he is at liberty again. I did not want to
withhold this answer from you, my good lords and friends.

1 Querfurt: town 15 kms east of Allstedt

2 Schmon: village about 13 kms east-south-east of Allstedt

3 Spielberg: village about 16 kms east-south-east of Allstedt

4 Liederstadt: village about 17 kms south-east of Allstedt

**Hans Schwab, Bailiff ¹ of Karsdorf ² and Schmon, to the
mayor and town-council of Allstedt
8th April 1524**

TbMA 2, Anhang 3, pp. 511-12.

Honourable good friends, I place myself readily at your service.

I have read in your letter that I am supposed to still have sitting in the prison in my bailiwick a prisoner of the illustrious, high-born Lord Georg, Duke of Saxony, Landgrave of Thuringia, Margrave of Meissen etc. This prisoner is accused of stealing a small altar-bell and other things from the chapel at Mallerbach. It is true that I was holding a man named Urban Brambach in my lord's prison, since he had taken a small altar-bell from the chapel. Your steward [Hans Zeiss] and others knew that I had him in custody for more than a week, but because no one asked for him to be handed over, I set him free. And he did not name any other [accomplices] in his confession. I did not want to withhold this answer from you.

1 German: 'Vogt'

2 Karsdorf: village 22 kms south-east of Allstedt

**Letter to Elector Friedrich of Saxony from the steward
Hans Zeiss, the town-council, and the mayor of Allstedt.
11th April 1524**

ThMA 2, Anhang 4, pp. 512–15

Gracious lord, we have read the letter from Your Electoral Grace with the complaints of the abbess [Sophia Schaffstedt] and the sisters of Naundorf, who complain that they had had to put up with many burdens and threats from us etc., which made them feel greatly endangered and troubled. We are obliged to make these known to Your Electoral Grace: And although we have great cause to respond to these complaints of the abbess more sharply than we do here below, we accept these lies with thanks and we praise the name of God from the bottom of our hearts. However, in order that Your Grace may recognize our innocence and the lies may be exposed, we inform you that we have obeyed your orders in matters both great and small, that we gave the nuns their tithe, and give them service, notwithstanding the fact that, on a daily basis, we had to listen to and put up with their slanders – and especially those of the abbess and her provost – and with their blasphemy against God's name, that we had to tolerate being called heretics by them, accused of falsely expounding the gospel, and more insults about which we have no wish to write here.

We have forbidden our entire community, under threat of punishment from your Electoral Grace and the town council, to take anything from the chapel at the *Fleck*¹ and our citizens did as they were instructed. But there was nothing left in that very same abandoned chapel except a good new [wooden?] floor. The abbess and the provost [Kaspar Klug] themselves permitted an elderly priest to remove this flooring and take it home. There is also a ruined tower next to the chapel, which has already half collapsed. When our citizens saw that the floor had been ripped out from the chapel and carried off, three or four citizens carried stones from the tower home with their hands to improve their own lot. But we made it known once more that this was forbidden and that those who had done this would be punished. But these citizens said that the provost had allowed them to do so. They wanted to testify to this before Your Electoral Grace. But we told them again that this should not have happened and the provost and the abbess would complain. So they went to see the provost and told him and he allowed them to carry the stones away from the tower. So here Your Electoral Grace will certainly see who in truth has vandalized and destroyed the chapel at the *Fleck* and that we are being falsely accused. Every Christian can judge that the accusations of the abbess, which she has made to Your Electoral Grace with her honey-sweet words, conceal

1 The location of this chapel is unknown. “Fleck” or “Flecken” is a common place name in the fields and forests surrounding Allstedt. It could have been a small chapel near the town of Allstedt, probably St. Elizabeth’s chapel mentioned in the district’s accounts. However, it is also possible that it was the Chapel of St. Erhard near the village of Winkel, where a pilgrimage was held on St. Mary Magdalene’s Day (July 22). See: Lucas Wölbing, *Müntzers langer Schatten*, Mühlhausen 2024, p. 39. It is specifically *not* Mallerbach.

bitter gall. We hope that you will believe us, because we are not writing falsehoods, but can prove the truth.

The chapel of Mallerbach lies in the forest, as Your Electoral Grace undoubtedly knows. In that same chapel they [the nuns] employed an old man who had sons and daughters in Allstedt. He complained and said that he had received a warning in the night. Someone had come up to the chapel and knocked and told him to leave. But he does not know who this was. However, he was told [by others?] not to leave because people were forbidden to harm him. He then went to the monastery to complain to the provost and the abbess. So he went off to the nunnery and made a complaint to the provost and the abbess. So the abbess then sent her men to the chapel to take away everything that was still good. The old man moved out. So the chapel was left open to all and sundry, anyone could enter it, but no one was officially accused.

One Sunday, when many woodcutters who were not locals and more than 2,000 strangers (many more than live in Allstedt) came to the sermon [Müntzer's], a small bell was lost from the chapel. So on the Tuesday after Palm Sunday, the provost of the nunnery sent two scribes and a man with a fire pot and a ladder to walk around the abandoned building, where no one lived, carrying lights and bundles of straw to look for the bell in the cellar and attic. God alone will know whether it is possible that they may have set fire to the chapel themselves, just to establish a cause for complaint. Since the wind was also very strong at that time, Your Grace should think about who set fire to that evil building and burned it down.

The following Thursday, when I, the steward, was told in the church that the chapel at Mallerbach was ablaze, I sent out several councillors and citizens to observe what was happening. They were not able to extinguish the fire, so I gave orders to prevent it from causing damage to the neighbouring woodland belonging to Your Electoral Grace. And now we are accused by the abbess of not having good intentions, and of starting the fire ourselves. And the provost, who is full of slanderous wild words, over which he has no control, was heard to say (as we understand from several reports and as he discussed with one of our citizens) that he will in return order Allstedt to be burned.

We are not complaining; we place this matter in God's hands and want nothing to do with the provost. Nevertheless, the provost and abbess make these accusations that threaten our life and limb. But the provost and his followers cannot prove that any of these accusations are true. Your Electoral Grace should recognize for yourself the true reasons for the abbess's complaints. If the abbess and the provost are able to name a suspect, we will support them to gain justice.

The bell was broken and one piece turned up in Allstedt: a priest named Heinrich Bodung and the owner of our bathhouse found it at Easter along with the clapper in an abandoned ditch and took them home. Gracious Prince and Lord, another piece of the bell was found two or three miles² from Allstedt in the territory of Duke Georg [of Saxony]. Who had carried it there? Let the provost and abbess take legal action against those people and not us, because we can

2 These are German miles; one German mile equates to around 7.5 kms.

prove (God willing) our innocence. We can provide evidence³ to show who took the few belongings of the nuns from the chapel and carried them away. But if the abbess knows someone who set fire to the chapel, she should name him or her. Otherwise, we hope that you will no longer believe her poisonous accusations and allow us to pursue her for these false statements.

I, the steward, have written to the abbess as she requested. I am sending you a copy of my letter.⁴ If I have done something wrong, then I no longer know what else to do. Even if it is considered wrong in this world, I know that it is considered right before God. Your Grace wrote that we should give the nuns their possessions and not impose any rules on them, such as forcing them to listen to the [Evangelical] sermons. I, the steward, have never done that, but merely asked them in my letter for peace and harmony. We all ask you to instruct the abbess to stop insulting us, as she has done unpunished before. For while she does so, we must remain silent, which is quite difficult for us. If what we have done is punishable, then we will suffer for God's sake.

We hope, however, that you will believe our true report and protect and defend us by the will of God, instead of believing those womanish, unfounded accusations. If we are to appear before you or your lord brother [Duke John] because of this report, we will do so. We will be obedient if you order us to leave the nuns alone. But we can no more protect them from people who do not live in our territory

3 Probably the letters shown in Documents 1 to 3 above.

4 This letter has not been traced.

than you can. And who will protect us poor people? Every day we have to hear from our enemies that they want to burn, destroy, capture and imprison us because of the Gospel. If we complained about this every time, you would have no peace day or night. If they [the nuns] give no one good cause, then no one will harm them. But pious people who love the truth will no longer tolerate it when the Gospel is called heretical. We did not want to conceal this from you in all submissiveness.

**Steward, Mayor and Town Council of Allstedt to Duke
Johann of Saxony.
24th May 1524**

ThMA 2, Anhang 5, pp. 516-17.

Most gracious lord, on the last Monday after Exaudi [9th May] Your Grace summoned the town-council and the people of Allstedt, along with myself [Hans Zeiss], on account of the accusations made by the abbess of Naundorf that we were responsible for threats made against the field-chapel at Mallerbach, and for destroying it and laying it waste. And during several interviews with your son [Duke Johann Friedrich], our gracious lord and Your adviser, we made our reply to these complaints. We were instructed, within 14 days, to search diligently for the people who committed these deeds and to punish them, in so far as we are able to find them within our community. When we came back home, we immediately gathered together our community and advised them of this instruction. Then we called every individual before us and asked them what they knew of the unfortunate events at the field-chapel and warned them that there would be consequences. But we were unable to find anyone in our community who had committed the deed. Only Antonius Behr and Hans Bodung stated that they had observed many people approaching the chapel. But they did not recognise them and also do not know what they did there, and also saw nothing. Because we could not arrive at any valid suspicions based on these statements, we feared lest we might end up punishing an innocent person rather than a guilty one. That would have led to considerable uproar, anger and trouble in our community. We know that Your Grace does not wish anyone to suffer violence unjustly, and so we have accused no

one for just now. We now ask you to allow us a further period of 14 days or three weeks. Your Princely Grace will see that we are obeying Your orders and simply wish to avoid prosecuting someone unjustifiably or even allowing that to happen. However, we send to you [*as attached below*] everything we have discovered so far, so that Your Grace does not think that we have done nothing. Your Princely Grace should not think badly of us in this matter and we ask for a merciful reply.

[*Attachment*]¹

Our Gracious Lord: on Jubilate Sunday [8th May], Andreas Tilling and Jakob Freitag from Langgrafroda² made a voluntary and unsolicited statement that some of their neighbours had removed from the chapel at Mallerbach a holy water font, altar-cloths, missal books and several silver clasps. They exchanged the clasps in Querfurt or Esensted³ for silver rings. We can verify this statement. And someone appeared in Nebra⁴ with wax and altar-cloths [from Mallerbach]. We can also verify that.

1 This attachment is not included in the *ThMA* 2 volume. Lucas Wölbing has located this text in the archives.

2 Langgrafroda: village about 7 kms south-east of Allstedt

3 Esensted: now a suburb in the east of Querfurt. There was a chapel here dedicated to St Bruno of Querfurt; items from one chapel therefore probably ended up in another chapel. (Thanks to Lucas Wölbing for this information.)

4 Nebra: small town about 18 kms south-east of Allstedt

**Hans Zeiss to Duke Johann of Saxony.
[Allstedt] 29th May 1524**

ThMA 2, Anhang 6, pp. 517-19

Gracious lord,

Since the people of Allstedt forwarded you a letter which came from the bailiff of Schmon,¹ and since it displeased you that [a suspect] had escaped without anyone doing anything to prevent it, I must now inform you of the following.

Before the people of Allstedt wrote to the bailiff, I did not know that Hans Schwab, the bailiff of Schmon had arrested someone going by the name of Urban Brambach, in connection with the Mallerbach chapel. The bailiff wrote this letter from hatred, and as soon as I heard about it I went to him to ask him why he had not contacted me right away, as a neighbouring official with connections to my gracious lord, and told me that he had arrested someone. He told me that he believed that I would already be aware of it. But [the prisoner] had done nothing other than gone to Mallerbach and taken away a bell which he found there, and which he sent here [i.e. to Allstedt]. So it was not necessary to keep him in prison any longer. When I heard the bailiff's reply, many other people were present.

Gracious lord, I would therefore entreat you to end your displeasure with me since, God willing, I wish to obey your instructions in so far as God permits me. You cannot lightly hold me in disfavour if you remember the many years of loyal service which I have given you and my lord the Electoral

1 Document 3 above.

Prince, as well as to the poor people and your lands here. Please do not let your displeasure gladden the enemies I have made during my service, for that will strengthen them and make them arrogant. There have been few officials since the days of lords of Querfurt² who have died a honourable death; rather, they have been shot or stabbed to death.³ I must expect the same fate, according to God's will. And after that, no cockerel or hen would crow! ⁴ No sword would be drawn to prevent this, nor would any judicial rod be shattered!⁵ He who must suffer, will suffer.

Gracious lord, since I have so recently been harshly punished with words on account of this lamentable and dangerous situation, a punishment which I have accepted, then I now entreat you to think mercifully of me, your poor servant. By Almighty God, although this matter is so unpleasant, with God's help I will proceed against the destroyers of the chapel, just as soon as I (God willing) discover the truth. I will obey your instructions so as to please you, for it grieves me that this affair happened during my term of office. I am submissively ready to serve you.-

2 The lords of Querfurt were the stewards of Allstedt until 1496.

3 Zeiss refers to the untimely deaths of two of his predecessors, including his immediate predecessor Wolf von Selmnitz, who died in 1519.

4 i.e. 'no one would weep over my grave, no one would care'.

5 i.e. 'no one would ever be punished'. Breaking a judicial rod over a criminal's head was a traditional sign of the death-penalty.

**Town-council and the whole community of Allstedt,
to Duke Johann.¹
[probably around 14th June 1524]**

TbMA 2, Nr. 76, pp. 252-6

May the true, eternal and righteous fear of God be with Your Grace.

We poor people, the council and community of Allstedt have always been submissive and obedient to Your brother, Duke Friedrich, the praiseworthy Electoral Prince, and wish to remain so from now on, just as we should, all of which we have proved in the affair of the nuns of Naundorf. Although they burdened us, we were directed by His Electoral Grace to pay the interest and tithes without any justifiable or Christian obligation, so that they would stop making a great fuss. But none of that helped; on the contrary, they found it necessary to approach you on the matter of the Mallerbach chapel and that other one at Fleck, deceitfully and unjustifiably with their godless, yes, their hateful cause, which they presented as legitimate.

If their cause should seem credible to Your Grace, then we poor people will be burdened, and before God we cannot allow such blasphemy to be maintained and defended. The Holy Scripture gives witness that we are innocent, for it is widely known that the poor people, out of ignorance, once honoured and prayed to the Devil at Mallerbach in the form of the statue of Mary. If this Devil has now been destroyed by good-hearted pious people, then how are we supposed to assist in arresting and imprisoning them, in the name of the

1 The text of this letter may possibly have been written by Thomas Müntzer, but was at least approved by him

Devil? We know from the testimony of the Apostle Paul that the sword has been given to Your Grace to take revenge on the godless and sinners, as well as for the honour and protection of the pious.

But because no particular damage was done by any of our people, which would have been detrimental to the common good, and because we have demonstrated our obedience to the praiseworthy Electoral Prince – unless His Grace by this means wishes to show he has more respect for Man than God, which however we cannot believe of either him or Your Grace – then we poor people ask neither for protection nor any acts of defence against our enemies. We poor people no longer wish to burden either Your Grace or the praiseworthy Electoral Prince. But we must at every moment expect mortal danger from the arrival of our threatening enemies who persecute us most foully on account of the gospel.

And so, for the sake of God, we pray that Your Grace will respect and encourage us as a Christian, praiseworthy prince, and listen and take to heart what God Our Creator himself said through that pious man Moses, as is written in Exodus chapter 23: “You shall not defend the Godless”. But because the whole world now knows that monks and nuns are idolatrous people, how can they justifiably be defended by pious Christian princes? We only wish to fulfil all that Your Grace and our praiseworthy Electoral Prince rightfully impose on us, with our lives and our goods. But for us to continue to pray to the Devil at Mallerbach and permit our brothers to be handed over to him as victims is something we would contemplate as little as being subject to the Turks. If we meet with violence as a result, then the whole world – and in particular the pious Elect of God - will know why we suffer and will see that we are becoming like Christ, who will protect Your Grace in the true fear of God.

**Hans Zeiss to Duke Johann.
19th June 1524**

ThMA 2, Anhang 11, pp. 522-4

Illustrious, High-born Prince, merciful lord.

In accordance with Your last order, that I and the mayor and town-council of Allstedt should make a search for those persons who attacked the chapel at Mallerbach, and arrest them, I have conducted some investigations. When I learned that several people from Allstedt were accused, I ordered the mayor and the council several times to obey the order. But it was difficult and they did nothing. Now, last Saturday, I arrested a member of the council, Ciliax Knauth, and placed him in the stocks in the castle, where he is still sitting. And then on Tuesday I spoke alone with the mayor on the matter, so that he would arrest further suspects. He replied that he could not do this without some help, which he would not be able to receive in Allstedt. And besides that, he thought that [the people] would gather in protest and that I could no longer trust them. At his suggestion, I then decided to fetch support from the surrounding villages and bring people to the castle. Which is what occurred. So the mayor left me on Tuesday evening, with the agreement that I would write that very evening to the council about the charges and invite them to come and meet me. When they appeared before me, I would say that the support [from the villages] had been sent to me, and would ask them if they would support me in carrying out those orders etc.

But when I wrote all this to them, as agreed, the mayor then

told me in person that “the guard has already been summoned”. And before my messenger returned to the castle, all the storm-bells were rung,¹ and down in the town the people of Allstedt stood ready all night in the company of the mayor, even the women, and all of them in full armament. When I realised the danger, I wrote to them to ask what they were doing. In reply, they sent me a letter which I now enclose.² It is important to consider how much danger these actions pose to me.

In the meantime, Knauth has been imprisoned in the stocks for more than a week, and this is not a reliable prison. So that he does not perish or escape when I leave the district in order to present my accounts [to you],³ I would now ask Your Grace to release him on bail or on a promise to present himself later [for further judicial action]. Then I would be freed of this worry and could report further to you in person.

1 Storm-bells could only be rung on the authority of the ducal representative – Zeiss. Ringing them without this authority was a criminal act.

2 See [Document 8a](#) below

3 i.e. the quarterly financial accounts for Allstedt

**Mayor, town-council and community of Allstedt
to Hans Zeiss.
13th June 1524**

ThMA 2, Anhang 7, pp. 519-20

To the honourable Hans Zeiss, steward of Allstedt, our good friend.

Dear Lord Steward, good friend, as we reported, we were reliably warned And we have a order¹ from our prince. Afterwards another report came to us that you were strengthening the guard around you, we considered that our instructions meant that we should arm ourselves, and so we gathered together our community in haste, from the necessity of having to withstand unjust violence. We hope that you will not think worse of us for that. We did not want to conceal this from your notice. Dated Monday after St Barnabus, *anno* 1524.

1 This was effectively a standing order, issued to all town authorities, permitting them to take up arms in the event of storms or attack or news of such.

**Duke Johann to Electoral Prince Friedrich.
Weimar, 22nd June 1524**

ThMA 2, Anhang 12, pp. 524-5

My fraternal love and entire loyalty always.

Illustrious Prince, dear brother and kinsman, after you had recommended that we should invite the people of Allstedt and those from the Naundorf nunnery here to Weimar, this was made to happen. So that the affair could not be construed as pleasing either to you or us, we instructed them to seek out the perpetrators, of whom there were about nine, seen by many people who were ploughing the surrounding fields. This was accepted and agreed by your steward [i.e. Zeiss] and the envoys.

But shortly afterwards the council of Allstedt wrote to us. Your steward was also here and presented us with what you can read in the enclosed copy.¹ Besides that, he also stated here that the people of Allstedt were intending to protect and arm themselves, if anyone tried to punish them. These are serious matters. Although we have many reasons to suspect that the steward, the mayor and the council have agreed this whole story amongst themselves, yet it would be troublesome to leave unpunished both for their ringing of the storm-bell and their attack on the church at Mallerbach.

And so we wished to inform you, so that you can consider further whether to write to the Allstedt people or whether to summon them once more or whether something else should be done. We also think that it would not go amiss if you were

1 See Zeiss' letter of 19th June – Document 8 above.

to summon the steward and demand a statement from him as to whether he would stand by his report made to me, or not. We will agree with you in whatever you think is best.

**Duke Johann to Electoral Prince Friedrich.
[Lochau,] 25th June 1524**

ThMA 2, Anhang 13, pp. 525-6

My fraternal love and entire loyalty always.

Illustrious Prince, dear brother and kinsman, we read your letter explaining what you had done about the Allstedt people and those from the nunnery at Naundorf, when you, at my request, summoned them before you. We also read your report on what you told them and what the council, community and steward of Allstedt had written to you.

We thank you amicably for your efforts and the suggestion that they should be summoned once more, if we considered it appropriate. You also expressed the suspicion that the matter had been agreed between the steward, the mayor and the council and you recommended that we summon the steward and order him to state whether he stood by what he reported in Weimar, or not. We will pursue this further with him. Whatever we find out, we will pass on to you later.

Hans Zeiss to Electoral Prince Friedrich.
[Lochau], 26th June 1524

ThMA 2, Anhang 14, pp.526–30

Most merciful Electoral Prince and Lord, although Your Princely Grace has not yet written to his counsellors, instructing them to interview me on the matter concerning the people of Allstedt, I wished to visit you in person after I had presented my accounts. As that occasion already took place in Weimar on the Monday after Exaudi, ¹ it was decided that the mayor and town-council of Allstedt and I should search for the people who attacked the chapel and arrest them. Accordingly, I looked diligently for the perpetrators, and consulted frequently with the town-council and especially with the mayor, so that we could carry out the instruction. But the town-council did not want to take any action and the mayor, from fear, did not want to arrest any suspects resident in Allstedt. In the end, on Saturday, the Eve of St Boniface, ² I and the town-sergeant arrested a member of the town-council whom I suspected, and secured him in the stocks in the castle.

On the following Tuesday, I summoned the mayor and told him that, as a magistrate, he should arrest the others as well, because that was his responsibility. But he replied that he neither could nor wanted to do that, for the council would not support him. He said that a mob had assembled and if he dared anything, he would suffer injury. After I had made several suggestions, he finally agreed the following with me:

¹ 9th May 1524

² 4th June 1524 – but in fact this event took place on 11th June.

since he, as mentioned, had little support in the town, and in order that there should be no warning given, I would summon many people from the villages to come to the castle in the evening and also summon the town-council to the castle and urge them to carry out those orders. I was to say that these people had been sent to me, and would go myself down in to the town with them and arrest the suspects, because the mayor had complained that the Allstedt people were concerned about the rogues who had mobbed together and could not do anything to stop them. That was my agreement with the mayor and I was pleased with this proposal. He took his leave from me and went home to Allstedt from the castle. I then engaged several people from the villages. When they came to the castle in the evening, I wrote, as agreed, to the mayor and council to summon them to the castle. The mayor told me that an escort had been arranged.

But before my messenger had returned to the castle, all the storm-bells in Allstedt were rung. I sent a note down [into the town] asking them to tell me what this meant, what they intended etc. They answered me in a note that they had been warned that many horsemen and soldiers were gathering in order to attack them. As is apparent from a letter which I copied to my Grace, Duke Johann, they had armed themselves according to a standing order, a copy of which they sent to Your Electoral Princely Grace, and awaited [the attack]. On my request that they come to me, they [the council] would not let anyone come without an escort, and they would only appear if I promised them free and safe passage, as can be seen from the notes which we exchanged until after midnight.³ It was not until morning that they came to me in the castle – the mayor, the council and some

3 See Documents [11a](#), [11b](#) and [11c](#) below. None of Zeiss' replies to those three notes have been preserved.

of the community, along with an escort. When I asked what their intentions were, they answered that they had been advised in writing that they were under threat from their enemies and that they would be attacked. In addition, at ten o'clock they had seen many horsemen at the gate, which is why they began to ring the storm-bells. They had not wanted to come to me without an escort, because they had heard that I would persecute them, for they had already seen that I had indeed arrested one of their fellow-councillors and secured him in the stocks. They were very unwilling to risk this danger and act of violence. So I replied to them as follows: "But your mayor knows that I summoned the people ⁴ here, to support you and the town-council. So I see some disloyalty here." Then the mayor said that he had not passed on this information to the council or the community. He had been taken by surprise by the ringing of the storm bells and could not proceed. With these words and assertions they took their leave and said they had written to my gracious lord, Duke Johann, asking that he should not punish them too harshly because of someone's idolatry.

On the following day I appeared in Weimar and waited a full week to see my gracious lord, Duke Johann, until yesterday, Saturday, so that I report to him verbally and in writing on this episode. In the meantime, I have received reliable reports that they [the people of Allstedt] would not permit themselves to be punished. If I were nevertheless to attempt that, then I would fail and I would suffer consequences, just as has already happened that evening. I have asked His Grace [Duke Johann] for orders about the prisoner who has been locked up for over a week, because I had to leave to present my accounts, and the prison is poorly equipped and I feared worse disturbances. His Grace allowed me to release the prisoner, as long as he swore an oath or vow. His Grace

4 i.e. the armed people from the villages

wished that you be told of all this etc.

Most gracious lord, I beg you to reflect mercifully on this matter. I believe that, if it is not prevented, a great turmoil will arise from this affair. The people are truly embittered against the nunnery. This would be especially true if Your Grace does not forbid the nuns and the abbess from making their inappropriate and scandalous accusations against Allstedt, and if Your Grace does not appoint a provost and other people to the nunnery for the sake of peace, and especially if the preacher Thomas Müntzer of Allstedt is not allowed to be heard before a public assembly and scholars, so that his teaching may be found righteous and irrefutable. However, if his teaching is found to be punishable, then he should be dissuaded from this in the proper manner and be ordered to leave this place, just as Your Grace considers best. But if one does not deal with him [Müntzer] in this way, then he will find such a great following among the common people for his teaching – which so many already support - that it will cost a lot of effort and labour [to suppress]. There will be such a turmoil in this place that I will no longer be able to conduct my duties as your officer in a peaceful way and without disadvantage. And so I beg you to consider this graciously and prevent it accordingly. If not, then this great distress, from which could arise both damages to the nunnery as well as rage amongst the people, will oblige me to ask you to be released from my duties. If I can serve you in any other way, then I am gladly willing to do so, life and limb. I would request a reply.

[11a]

**Mayor, town-council and chamberlain,¹ together with the
entire community of Allstedt to Hans Zeiss.**

13th June 1524

TbMA 2, Anhang 8, p.520

To the honourable Hans Zeiss, steward of Allstedt, our well-disposed good friend.

We greet you in amicable service, honourable and well-disposed sir steward. In reply to your letter that we should appear before you at the castle, as your letter requested, our community prevented us from doing so. But if you can write to us, promising us security and safe passage, then we will be pleased to come. But if you have concerns about coming down to us, then we will also offer similar guarantees to you. We are otherwise willing to help you in all other matters. Dated Monday after St Barnabus *anno* etc 1524

1 German 'Kämmerer' - chamberlain or treasurer.

[11b]

**Mayor and town-council of Allstedt to Hans Zeiss.
13th June 1524**

TbMA 2, Anhang 9, p.521

To the honourable Hans Zeiss, steward of Allstedt, our good friend.

We greet you in amicable service, honourable and well-disposed sir steward. We have received your written safe-conduct and will come to you tomorrow morning at 5 o'clock, together with some of the community, and in keeping with your letter, we will discuss matters amicably, for the community does not wish us now to ignore your instructions. We did not wish to delay our answer to you. Dated Monday after St Barnabus *anno* 1524.

[11c]

**Mayor, town-council and community of Allstedt to
Hans Zeiss.
14th June 1524**

ThMA 2, Anhang 10, p.522

To the honourable Hans Zeiss, steward of Allstedt, our good friend.

We greet you in amicable service, honourable and well-disposed sir steward. We replied in writing last night to the safe-conduct which you had sent us, stating that we would appear before you in the castle this morning at 5 o'clock. But in our haste we did not understand that the safe-conduct stated that we should appear before you immediately, and without delay, and that the safe-conduct would last only a short time. Therefore we have concerns about the order to appear before you. But if we are given in writing a satisfactory assurance and a safe-conduct in the name of our most gracious lord or from yourself in the name of His Electoral Grace,¹ then we will gladly come to you and discuss all these pressing matters amicably. And if you wish to come down to us [in the town], then we will also welcome you. And we are anxious to act according to your amicable wishes. We ask for your reply. Tuesday after St Barnabus *anno* 1524.

1 The 'gracious lord' and 'His Electoral Grace' are one and the same man: Erlector Friedrich

**Electoral Prince Friedrich to the mayor, town-council and
community of Allstedt.
Lochau, 27th June 1524**

ThMA 2, Anhang 15, pp.530–2

Dear loyal servants. We have previously requested the high-born prince, our dear brother Duke Johann, to summon you and the people from the nunnery at Naundorf, to come to Weimar on account of the disputes between you and, after discussions, to resolve this affair according to the law. Now our dear brother has written to us and informed us how he sees the situation. And our steward too, who is present with us here, has reported some of this to us. But although our aforementioned brother, after interviewing the steward and yourselves in the council, had given the order that you should look diligently for the perpetrators who violently stormed the chapel at Mallerbach and destroyed it etc, so that they would not remain unpunished, you have nevertheless sent a letter [to our brother]. In it you make clear that you wish to prevent and set aside the punishment due to these culprits and law-breakers, and you would even encourage and support these perpetrators – even although it is your duty to do otherwise, in accordance with your oath and obligations and the mercy which you have always found with us.

That such a thing would displease us is easy to understand. But since you doubtless know who the culprits and law-breakers are who committed wilful acts of sacrilege at the chapel, then we command you, in accordance with the duty which you owe us, to work together with our steward at Allstedt, to whom we have also given orders, and to have those people suitably punished and o longer to act wilfully

and sacrilegiously in future or to allow other people to do so, to avoid our disfavour and greater punishment. For, according to the law and teaching of God, that which you are trying to silence and suppress with violence – what you think disturbs Him – God's own grace and strength will destroy, without any mortal power, hand or oppression.

Therefore we expect you to be obedient in all these things and not to conduct yourselves otherwise. These are our earnest thoughts.

**Record of interviews of Thomas Müntzer and people from
Allstedt.**

Weimar, 31st July and 1st August 1524

TbMA 3, Nr. 99, pp.151–6

On the Monday after St James' Day [1st August] the preacher from Allstedt was charged, as had been reported to our most gracious and merciful lords [Friedrich and Johann], with having preached openly to the people in order to incite and provoke them into joining together to form a league against the godless, as he calls them, claiming that leagues are authorised by the Bible; but, in the opinion of our gracious lord [Johann], this can never be proved by him [Müntzer] by using the Bible.

Secondly, our gracious lord has heard that he [Müntzer] used insulting words against the brother of his princely Grace, the Elector [Friedrich], which were at that time noted down by many people as he spoke them, and these were sent in writing to our gracious lord just a few days ago. These words can be read in the accompanying notes.¹ In addition, the other [preacher], Simon Haferitz, also used insulting and provocative words in a sermon. If our gracious lord had been advised of this earlier, then his Princely Grace would not have hesitated to summon him here as well. These words, if they were spoken by them in this manner, had not merely slightly offended our gracious lord, but deeply hurt him, for the brother of his Princely Grace, the Electoral Prince, is a highly-esteemed, praiseworthy and honourable pious prince. But the preacher also knows that he should teach the people to honour the authorities, and therefore he should do the

1 See [Document 13a](#) below

same himself.

Thirdly, our most gracious and merciful lord has heard that he [Müntzer] preaches and teaches the people things which have no basis in the Bible. But let us leave that aside just now. Perhaps at the appropriate time these matters can be discussed further with him.

But because the first two charges demand the attention of our most gracious and merciful lords, who have been appointed by God as rulers, so he [Müntzer] has been summoned so that his report and reply can be heard etc.

He then replied, on the first point, that he had not incited the people to form a league, and that was the truth. After Lord Friedrich von Witzleben had ambushed some of his own people, because they were on their way to hear his [Müntzer's] preaching in Allstedt, these people came to him. And there was a large crowd of miners present, who spoke to him after the sermon he preached there, and they asked him what they should do, because they were suffering such aggravation on account of the gospel, and they wondered whether they should not join together to defend themselves against the violence. But they still wanted to pay interest and tithes to their lords, and carry out the same services and corvée labour to the same degree as before. But when he [Müntzer] realised that he might be blamed for this misfortune, he simply suggested that he would recommend that a league should be formed, so that they were not prevented from hearing the gospel.

On the second point, he would not admit anything, but stated that he had never spoken those, or similar, words.

On the matter of teaching, he was prepared to justify it

before a Christian and trustworthy congregation.

The steward, mayor and the envoys from the town-council were told that our most gracious and merciful lords had been informed that the preacher had incited the people to form a league and cause an uproar, and that the people of Allstedt had thereupon joined together with various outsiders. What the reasons for this are, the Electoral and Princely Graces do not know, but the people of Allstedt should realise how the princes will proceed if it becomes necessary.

Some time ago, when the steward and some councillors were summoned here, along with people from the Naundorf nunnery, on account of the destruction and burning of the chapel, they were ordered to look for the culprits and to arrest them. They promised to do so. But then, after a few days, the steward and the town-council wrote to our gracious lord [Johann] and asked to be given some more time. But when after this the steward and mayor discussed how they were to carry out the order regarding the culprits, they [the people of Allstedt] are said to have opposed it – so it was reported to our gracious lord – and had organised a rebellion, rung the storm-bells and put on armour, so that the instruction of His Princely Grace could not be carried out. They should now consider just how far this action lies from their oaths and duties. The mayor and steward are then supposed to have agreed on how to carry out the order.

But when the steward tried to carry out his part of the agreement, the mayor appeared before the rebellious crowd in armour. In their sermons, both the preachers [Müntzer and Haferitz] are said to have used insulting language towards our gracious and most merciful lords [Johann and Friedrich], as is shown from the aforementioned notes. It would have been justified if they [the town-council], insofar as they were

present at these events, had forbidden the preachers from using these words. They have now been summoned so that their report and reply on all these points can be heard.

To this they replied that it was correct that the preacher [Müntzer] had openly and with impetuous words called on the people to join together against the godless, and for the women and girls to defend themselves with hayforks and pitchforks.

But they know nothing about any words which the preacher is supposed to have spoken concerning our most gracious and merciful lords, although it is true that the Magister [Müntzer] sometimes expresses himself somewhat vehemently.

The town-council was just as ready as the steward and the mayor to obey the orders. But their intentions had been passed on through the town-sergeant, which is why the citizens rose up in order to arm themselves. Then the preacher ordered them to ring the storm-bells and because they could not do it, he did it himself.

The mayor asked for pardon and said that, when he wanted to carry out his agreement [with Zeiss] and had sent for the town-council, they came to him and told him that if he [Zeiss] would not come down to them, then he should just leave things alone. And then he [the mayor] summoned them again, and some people in armour and carrying spears came to his house and said they wanted to hear what he thought. When he told them, they hurried away and said they would reply to him later. When he followed them with his eyes, he saw that the Magister [Müntzer] had come up to them and that everyone was wearing armour. When he saw this, he made his way quickly to the town-gate in an attempt to reach the castle. But when he came to the gate, the woman

guarding the gate closed it in his face.

When this happened and he did not know what was going on, he admonished her and then he went up in front of the churchyard to ask the crowd what all this meant. They replied that he should simply state whether he stood by the gospel or was opposed to it. If only they had the steward [on their side]. When he saw how matters stood, he had to give them a good answer.

The envoys [from the council] admitted that the preacher had given a sermon about the league. There were 300 outsiders in the little town, who begged the community to join with them. Whereupon the community asked the council to form this league. And then the council and the community joined with the outsiders. If the followers of the gospel in the county and the district ² were attacked, then they would give life and limb in support of each other. But they were still prepared to pay interest and rents to the nobility and do other things as before.

Our gracious lord [Johann] found it disconcerting to hear about this league from these poor, unskilled people and he ordered them earnestly to abolish this league, and he also said this to the council and community. For our gracious lord wishes to consult with His Electoral Grace on the matter, and he will report back to them later. But they know that their Electoral and Princely Graces do not prevent their subjects from hearing the gospel, just as long as (God willing) it was preached correctly and purely everywhere. Therefore they had no reason for such a league. There are among you a handful who lead their comrades astray, towards hostility [i.e.

2 The 'county' is the area under the control of the counts of Mansfeld; 'district' includes the areas under the governance of Allstedt (Duke Johann and Prince Friedrich) or Sangerhausen (Duke Georg).

rebellion], but afterwards, if it were to go badly, they would manage to pull their necks from the noose.

Thereupon the envoys of the town-council said that they would share this advice with the full council and their neighbours. They were only poor people who did not fully understand. The preacher had persuaded them to everything they did, or had done. And they asked that our gracious lord would give them a letter to take back to the council and community, which His Princely Grace duly did.

The steward, mayor and envoys were then told, in the light of this situation, to dismiss the printer, and they agreed to do this. The envoys of the council however stated that they had advanced the printer 100 guilders, at the request of the Magister [Müntzer]. If he did not complete the printing of the mass-books, then they would not get their money back. So they were then told not to do anything about this until there received further instructions.

The preacher was given the following instruction: although he claims never to have preached a sermon encouraging the people to form a league, it has been established that he did in fact do so. Whether he was justified in doing this or not, is up to his own conscience. But because this and other improprieties, which he had encouraged in Allstedt, are known about, our gracious lord [Johann] will report on this hearing to our most gracious lord [Friedrich] and consult further with him. The judgement of His Electoral Grace would be advised to him [Müntzer], so that he may heed it.

He was told to wait for this and to conduct himself peacefully in future.

**Anonymous report on the preaching of Müntzer and
Haferitz**

The following words were spoken and preached from the pulpit at Allstedt by Thomas Müntzer and Simon Haferitz, apostate of the Carmelite Order, publicly and before all the people: firstly, Thomas Müntzer stated openly that the old grey-beard, the Prince [Friedrich], had as much wisdom in his head as I have in my backside. Also: the Prince does not understand the gospel. He does not accept the gospel, and he is not worthy of it. He wishes to direct and arrange matters which he himself does not understand. And further and similarly horrible words. Later, on the Monday after Pentecost [16th May], the apostate Simon Haferitz had, among other things in his sermon, scolded and cried aloud the following: you dear people, you see what our lords do. They were from the very beginning those who founded the monasteries and churches – one should say, the whorehouses and murder-pits – and today still protect and support them. So you are blind and deaf if you imagine they are your lords. I would reject them. Princes born to their station do no one any good. So choose yourselves a prince and cast aside the princes of Saxony as hereditary lords. Elect your own lord. The hereditary lords do nothing except skin and flay you. But you are so blind and still think they are princes. Reject them, and when you write to them, do not write “by God’s grace, Duke of Saxony”, but rather “by God’s disgrace, Duke of Saxony”, and not “our lord etc”. These and so many more such blasphemies, abuse and insulting words were spoken against the Electoral Princely Graces that it is not possible to list them all here in writing.