

Book Reviews

History and Social Science Reviews

Stuart Murray, *The Legacy of Melchior Rinck: Anabaptist Pioneer in Hesse*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2022. Pp. 271. Softcover, \$39.99 US.

Scholars have generally paid scant attention to the developments of Anabaptism in central Germany. Thanks to Stuart Murray, we now have a better picture of the early stages of the movement, especially in the territory of Hesse, along with a fuller portrait of one of its primary leaders, Melchior Rinck. Murray depicts Rinck as a reformer, a revolutionary, and an Anabaptist who does not easily fit into any of the diverse branches of Anabaptism. It is a story worth telling and contributes to the scholarship of the Anabaptist movement as a whole.

In the first chapter, Murray introduces Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, a leading figure within German Protestantism, committed to the Lutheran position, who tended to advocate for compromises among religious competitors rather than foment division and hostility. Under Philip's jurisdiction, Hessian Anabaptism emerged with close connections to the peasants' movement, influenced by the South German Anabaptist Hans Hut, eventually also intersecting with Dutch Anabaptists associated with David Joris and Moravian missionaries such as Peter Riedemann. Melchior Rinck was a prominent early voice in the Hessian Anabaptist movement, based in the village of Sorga, near the city of Hersfeld. Hessian Anabaptism was somewhat amorphous in character, reflecting simple piety and reacting to various elements of Lutheranism. Anabaptist numbers in Hesse increased throughout the 1530s; however, the Marburg

disputation of 1538 involving Martin Bucer offered compromises on various matters that encouraged several Anabaptists to return to the state churches. After the 1540s, Anabaptist numbers were in decline, although Anabaptists could still be found in Hesse in the first half of the seventeenth century.

In chapter 2, Murray notes that Rinck's career first became visible in 1523 when he was chaplain in Hersfeld, preaching against the corruption in the Catholic Church. Rinck would soon take a more radical position when he joined the peasant leader Thomas Müntzer, near Eisenach. As the peasants' rebellion became more widespread, Müntzer persuaded participants at Frankenhausen in May of 1525 that the time was right to challenge the authorities openly, with the presumption that God would intervene to defend the peasants. Rinck became a leading combatant at the fateful battle where thousands were slaughtered but managed to escape the carnage, and wisely remained in hiding for eighteen months. He reappeared in company with Hans Denck, who likely baptized him sometime in 1527. Rejecting armed insurrection as contrary to God's will, although remaining convinced that the gospel called on Christians to be concerned about social justice as Müntzer had argued, Rinck set out to become an Anabaptist missionary, travelling to the south German city of Worms, then to an area around Hersfeld where he established several congregations including one at Sorga, which became a centre for Rinck's mission work in Hesse and Thuringia. In 1529, Rinck was arrested for his Anabaptist activities and would have been executed had not Philip intervened. Rinck ended up with a life sentence in prison, where he remained until his death, likely sometime after 1560.

In the next three chapters, Murray introduces Rinck's extant writings, including the interrogations of Rinck and testimonies involving both his colleagues and opponents. He describes Rinck's theological views in some detail and assesses Rinck's legacy including his persistent critique of infant baptism, his desacralizing of the Lord's Supper, his somewhat nuanced views on civil authority, and his attention to the concept of love. Murray also addresses the short-lived but nevertheless lasting impact that Rinck's reforming efforts may have had on the Hessian state, noting that while Anabaptist views on infant baptism and separation were never sanctioned, reforms in the established churches were introduced as a result of Anabaptist influences through the writings of Martin Bucer—reforms such as the introduction of the rite of confirmation, a new interest in education and instruction, an emphasis on lay participation in congregational life, and the introduction of church discipline including the practice of the ban. The book concludes with Leonard

Gross's and Ellen Yutzy Glebe's translations of Rinck's writings along with letters about Rinck, an attachment concerning Landgrave Philip's 1531 ordinance directed toward the Anabaptists, and records of interrogations to which Rinck and other Anabaptists were subjected.

The story of Hessian Anabaptism may have been less enduring than those of other branches of Anabaptism, given the movement's decline after the 1540s, but as Murray argues, the story is worth considering if we are to understand the various contexts within which Anabaptism emerged. A particular strength of Murray's work is his unwillingness to neatly situate Melchior Rinck in one theological camp or another. Like many Anabaptists, Rinck's identity was complex, shaped by overlapping influences. His thinking was likely formed by notables such as Thomas Müntzer, Hans Hut, and Hans Denck, yet intriguingly his hermeneutics and biblicism seem to have been more in line with the thinking of Swiss Anabaptism than with the South German Anabaptists that he was more familiar with.

Stuart Murray has written several books in the field of Anabaptist studies and mission. Since 2001, he has been involved in the Anabaptist Mennonite Network in England and in 2014 he became a founding director of the Centre for Anabaptist Studies at Bristol Baptist College. Building on the work of scholars such as Ellen Yutzy Glebe, Kat Hill, and John Oyer, Murray has provided another window through which to view the first years of Anabaptism. It is a welcome addition to a portrait of a complex movement associated with the Radical Reformation of the sixteenth century.

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Brian Brewer, ed., *T&T Clark Handbook of Anabaptism*. London: T&T Clark, 2022. Pp. xii + 634. Hardcover, \$277.50; Softcover, \$72.45.

The present volume is one of a rapidly expanding series of such handbooks, which are designed to provide extensive introductions to various fields of theological study. This handbook, edited by Brian Brewer of George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University, primarily focuses on the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century. Brewer's helpful introduction to the collection of essays signals that the book does not seek to represent historical Anabaptism as a monolithic movement; rather, the array of topics and contributors "represent a diversity of views on Anabaptist origins,