



# The Tailor-King: The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptist Kingdom of Muenster

By Anthony Arthur

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He was only a Dutch tailor's apprentice, but from 1534 to 1535, Jan van Leyden led a radical sect of persecuted Anabaptists to repeated triumphs over the combined powers of church and state. Revered by his followers as the new David, the charismatic young leader pronounced the northern German city of Muenster a new Zion and crowned himself king. He expropriated all private property, took sixteen wives (supposedly emulating the biblical patriarchs), and in a deadly reign of terror, executed all who opposed him. As the long siege of Muenster resulted in starvation, thousands fled Jan's deadly kingdom while others waited behind the double walls and moats for the apocalyptic final attack by the Prince-Bishop's hired armies, supported by all the rulers of Europe.

With the sudden rise to power of a compelling personality and the resulting violent threat to ordered society, Jan van Leyden's distant story strangely echoes the many tragedies of the twentieth century. More than just a fascinating human drama from the past, *The Tailor-King* also offers insight into our own troubled times.

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### **Bibliography**

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**Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Carnage abounds in this shocking account of the 16th-century Anabaptist revolt of Münster, during which some 9000 residents barricaded themselves in the north German town for more than a year, proclaiming a militant, anti-Catholic theocracy. Led by the 24-year-old Jan van Leyden, a charismatic tailor's apprentice from Holland, the revolt quickly jettisoned its promise of a community united by voluntary faith, becoming instead a textbook study in extremism. The Anabaptist message, contends Arthur, was predicated on the appeal of the irrational Asignally, a zealous belief that the Second Coming would unfold in 1534 in Münster, where the loyal Anabaptists would wage the ultimate battle between good and evil. A master propagandist, the young, self-anointed King Jan swiftly ordered all books save the Bible consigned to a bonfire and even declared a new order of marriage: mandatory polygamy. Amply serviced by his 16-wife harem, Jan then loosed what Arthur (Bushmasters, etc.) alternately describes as a reign of terror and a carnival of madness upon the town, in which pikestaffs whirled and halberds raged against unrepentant adherents of the Roman Catholic Church. Both Catholics and Protestants opposed the Anabaptists, and the sect's contempt for temporal authority of any kind made it the object of persecution by Germany's powerful princes. Students of millenarian movements will enjoy notable parallels to today's apocalyptic sects like the Branch Davidians. Vividly written and credibly researched, this book is entertaining history with implicit contemporary relevance. (Sept.)

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From Library Journal

Every revolution has a radical fringe, and the Reformation was no exception. The Anabaptists, who took over and created their own kingdom in the northern German city of Münster, frightened even Martin Luther. Arthur (English, California State Univ., Northridge) has written an excellent account of the Anabaptist kingdom, which has not received much attention recently. His is one of the more readable academic histories in recent memory. Arthur deftly uses primary sources to craft a story that reads like a good thriller. His analysis in the final chapter is a masterly comparison of the events in Münster to what happened to the Branch Davidians in Waco, TX. Any doubts about the importance of the bloody events of more than 400 years ago are erased by the parallels that Arthur draws. How could Waco, Oklahoma City, and Kosovo have happened? It all has happened before, with ghastly results. Highly recommended for public libraries and undergraduate collections. A Randall L. Schroeder, Wartburg Coll., Waverly, IA

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From Booklist

The sixteenth-century Anabaptist uprising in the northern German city of Munster, under the leadership of tailor's apprentice Jan van Leyden, is a fascinating story that has spawned many popular accounts in German. Its elements include the heroism, intrigue, greed, sex, and violence of a late-twentieth-century blockbuster novel, and Arthur's timing in presenting his account neatly coincides with the current bull market for apocalypticism, aka millenarianism. For the most part, Arthur draws on historical records and fictional accounts to recount the transformation of a protodemocratic uprising into a theocratic nightmare distorted on all sides by flawed and often unscrupulous leaders and followers whose hope regularly led them into gullibility. Arthur's attempts to draw explicit parallels with recent events and the Freudian framework within which he draws them are detractions, but they are restricted almost entirely to the final chapter. Although Arthur imparts little about Anabaptism, he provides a riveting story and pointers to other sources for reflection on the still important interplay of religious faith and theological and political authority. *Steven*

*Schroeder*

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#### **Rebecca Clark:**

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is The Tailor-King: The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptist Kingdom of Muenster this guide consist a lot of the information on the condition of this world now. That book was represented how do the world has grown up. The dialect styles that writer require to explain it is easy to understand. Often the writer made some exploration when he makes this book. That's why this book appropriate all of you.

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