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Johannes Buxtorf I and the Circumcision Incident of 1619

by

Stephen G. Burnett

Johannes Buxtorf I has frequently been portrayed in the scholarly literature as a vigorous proponent of missions to the Jews and an implacable foe of their religion¹. The circumcision incident of 1619 casts a slightly different light upon Buxtorf and his relations with the Jews. While Buxtorf made his religious objections to Jewish circumcision clear, his opinion of the event and the city council's reaction to it differed markedly. Differing views of what constituted "appropriate" behavior for Christians toward Jews lie at the heart of this unhappy incident.

While the circumcision incident is well known in outline to scholars, its numerous retellings rest on only two studies. The classic account of the story was given by Johann Caspar Ulrich in his *Sammlung Jüdischer Geschichten*². Ulrich's sources included a letter written by Buxtorf to Kaspar Waser and either direct use of the relevant Basel *Ratsprotokolle* or notes taken from them. His account contains details such as the name of the *Oberstknecht* and the amounts of the fines assessed which are not contained in Buxtorf's letter³. He may also have

I would like to express my special thanks to Dr Martin Steinmann of the Basel UB and Prof. Hans Rudolf Guggisberg of Basel University for their help in the preparation of this article, particularly for their willingness to locate several obscure references in manuscript sources.

¹ Nicholas C. Heutger, "Johannes Buxtorf in Basel: Hebraist und Vater der Judenmission," *Judaica* 24 (1968): 78–81, and Mark R. Cohen, "Leone da Modena's Riti: a Seventeenth Century Plea for Social Toleration of the Jews," *Jewish Social Studies* 34 (1972): 287–319.

² Johann Caspar Ulrich, *Sammlung Jüdischer Geschichten, welche sich mit diesem Volk in dem XIII. und folgenden Jahrhunderten bis auf M DCC LX. in der Schweiz von Zeit zu Zeit zugetragen. Zur Beleuchtung der allgemeinen historie dieser Nation herausgegeben.* (Basel, 1768; reprint ed., Westmead, Farnborough Hants, England: Gregg International, 1969), p. 207.

³ Buxtorf to Kaspar Waser, Basel, June 15, 1619, Zürich Zentralbibliothek (hereafter abbreviated ZB) Ms F 167: 47. For an assessment of Ulrich's work and the sources which he consulted for his account of Basel Jewish history see Lothar Rothschild, *Johann Caspar Ulrich von Zürich und seine "Sammlung jüdischer Geschichten in der Schweiz,"* (Zürich: Dissertationsdruckerei A.–G. Gebr. Lee-
mann, 1933), pp. 56–57.

used the account in Daniel Bruckner's supplement to Wurstisen's *Bassler Chronik*⁴. Achilles Nordmann gave a short but detailed study of the incident in his history of the Jews in Basel, quoting extensively from the *Ratsprotokolle*⁵. Neither of these accounts, however, does justice either to the rich source material available or to Buxtorf's role in the incident.

Basel had had no permanent Jewish residents since the end of the fourteenth century. The only exceptions to this rule were Jews employed by the Hebrew printers. On September 5, 1617, the Basel city council received a petition from Buxtorf and from Sebastian Beck, the rector of the university, requesting permission to print a new edition of the Venice rabbinical Bible. They noted that used rabbinical Bibles could cost 30–50 Pounds and so were financially beyond the means of many scholars. The new edition would serve to encourage the study of the Old Testament in Hebrew⁶. The city council responded quickly to this request and allowed Ludwig König to employ two Jewish correctors on the condition that they work only for him and engage in no other business dealings in Basel⁷.

König hired three experienced Hebrew printers to prepare the Bible edition. Abraham Braunschweig served as the principal editor⁸. Braunschweig had also previously worked as a bookseller and had

⁴ Christian Wurstisen, *Bassler Chronik*, Darinnen alles was sich in Oberen Teutschen Landen, nicht nur in der Stadt und Bistume Basels, von ihrem Ursprung her, nach ordnung der Zeiten, in Kirchen und Welt händeln, biß in das gegenwärtige M. D. L. XXX. Jar gedenckwirdigs zugetragen . . . , 3d ed. with a supplement by Daniel Bruckner (Basel, 1765; reprint ed., Basel: Emil Birkhäuser, 1883), p. 592. Ulrich did use at least the earlier version of Wurstisen's chronicle. Rothschild, Ulrich, p. 64.

⁵ Achilles Nordmann, "Geschichte der Juden in Basel seit dem Ende der zweiten Gemeinde bis zum Einführung der Glaubens- und Gewissensfreiheit. 1397–1875," *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 13 (1914): 32–34.

⁶ Sebastian Beck and Johannes Buxtorf, "Bericht über das Biblisch Truck, so man jetztund zu trucken begehret," September 5, 1617. Basel Staatsarchiv (hereafter abbreviated SA), Handel und Gewerbe, JJJ 1.

⁷ Basel SA, Protokolle, Kleiner Rat, Bd. 15, f. 198^r, September 6, 1617. Permission was apparently later given König to hire a third Jewish worker for the project. Nordmann notes that in 1578, the Basel city council had received a similar residence petition from a Christian printer (Ambrosius Froben) for a Jewish worker in order to complete work on the Basel Talmud. While the council's minutes for this period have not been preserved, permission was almost certainly granted. "Geschichte," pp. 28–29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 331–343. Abraham b. Eliezer Braunschweig had worked as a printer in Hanau. See Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana* (Berlin, 1852–60; reprint ed., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964), nos. 383 (1610) and 413 (1617). Steinschneider's *Catalogus* is hereafter abbreviated as StCB.

met Buxtorf through his business⁹. The other Jews who worked on the Bible edition were Mordecai Gumplin and Elijah b. Judah of Ulm¹⁰. The three men lived in the city, for a while in the homes of Buxtorf and of his son-in-law the younger Ludwig König¹¹.

Apparently their families also had permission to live in Basel, since in May of 1619 Abraham's wife gave birth to a son. Abraham planned to have the boy circumcised and wished to invite several other Jews who lived in the area to witness the ceremony. He and Buxtorf approached Georg Martin Gläser, the city official responsible for Jewish affairs¹², to seek his permission both to conduct the rite and to invite other Jewish guests from outside the city. Gläser agreed to both requests. The circumcision took place on June 2, 1619 and was attended by Buxtorf, the younger Ludwig König, Johann Kessler Sr. (who directed the printing presses for König) and his son Johann, as well as Heinrich a Diest, one of Buxtorf's students, in addition to the Jewish guests¹³.

⁹ Buxtorf mentions a bookseller named Abraham of Klingnau ("Abraham judaeum Klingovensem") in his letter to Waser, Basel July 14, 1609, Zürich SA Ms E II 383: 853–4. Augusta Welder-Steinberg, *Geschichte der Juden in der Schweiz vom 16. Jahrhundert bis nach der Emanzipation*, ed. Florence Guggenheim-Grünberg, 2 vols. (Goldach: Schweizerischer Israelitischer Gemeindebund, 1966), 1: 61 notes that Abraham Braunschweig lived in Lengnau (a town in the same area as Klingnau) after his period of residence in Basel.

¹⁰ Mordecai b. Sabbatai of Posen, known as Mordecai Gumplin, served both as an editor for Prijs imprints nos. 182, 205, 206, and as a corrector for the Hebrew Bible edition. See Joseph Prijs, *Die Basler Hebräischen Drucke (1492–1866)*, ed. Bernhard Prijs (Olten and Freiburg i. Br.: Urs Graf Verlag, 1964). Elijah b. Judah Ulm worked as a typesetter for the Bible edition. He had worked previously (and worked again afterwards) as a printer for the Haunau Hebrew printer. See StCB no. 403 (1611–1614); 1623–1630.

¹¹ This was true at least after the trial by the council. See Basel SA, Protokolle, Kleiner Rat, Bd. 16, f. 157^v, June 16, 1619. Whether they lived there before the trial is unclear, although Ulrich asserted that they did. See Sammlung, p. 207. The two houses are numbers 1958 and 2178 in Felix Platter's *Beschreibung der Stadt Basel 1610 und Pestbericht 1610/11*, ed. Valentin Lötscher, *Basler Chroniken*, Bd. 11 (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe Verlag, 1987).

¹² The Oberstknecht had had this responsibility since 1552. See Basel SA, Ratsbücher, A 6 (Schwarzes Buch), fol. 87a, and Achilles Nordmann, "Geschichte der Juden," p. 15, n. 2. The Oberstknecht was an official who was responsible for supervising the master of the Watch, the Paymaster and the city messengers. He reported directly to the city council. See Rudolf Wackernagel, *Geschichte der Stadt Basel*, vol. 2, part 1 (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1911), p. 233.

¹³ Basel SA, Protokolle, Kleiner Rat, Bd. 16, f. 156^v, June 16, 1619, and Buxtorf to Waser, Basel, June 15, 1619, Zürich ZB, Ms F 167: 47^r. On Henricus à Diest, see Hans Georg Wackernagel, ed. *Die Matrikel der Universität Basel: 1460–1818*, 5 vols. (Basel: Verlag der Universitätsbibliothek, 1951–1980), 3: 184.

Official reaction to the circumcision was both swift and harsh. One of the city's pastors submitted a written complaint to the city council on June 5. The council ordered that the Jews be arrested and decided to investigate the entire incident¹⁴. After the first of two preliminary hearings Braunschweig's wife and infant son were ordered to be expelled from the city¹⁵.

Buxtorf feared the result of the council's deliberations. He wrote to Waser that he had become an object of hatred for all, not only because he had witnessed the circumcision, but because he had sponsored the publication of a Jewish book¹⁶. He fully expected that the three Jewish correctors would be expelled from the city and that the rabbinical Bible edition, which was nearly completed, would have to be abandoned¹⁷. There were even those who felt that Buxtorf himself should be expelled from the city¹⁸.

During the city council meeting of June 16 the official accusation was read to the defendants and, after hearing the testimony of the Christian defendants, the council delivered its verdict¹⁹. Buxtorf, L. König the younger, and both Kesslers were rebuked for having attended the circumcision, because their presence had not only strengthened the Jews in their unbelief (*vis-à-vis* Christianity) but had angered "many honorable people, both of spiritual and secular standing." Gläser was charged with exceeding his authority by allowing the circumcision to take place and by allowing other Jews to witness it. Buxtorf's only defence was that he had sought permission for what had transpired. The council then passed sentence, fining both

¹⁴ Basel SA, Protokolle, Kleiner Rat, Bd. 16, f. 154^r, June 5, 1619, and Buxtorf to Waser, Basel, June 15, 1619, Zürich ZB Ms F 167: 47. Alfred Müller discusses the legal jurisdiction of the Kleiner Rat in "Die Ratsverfassung der Stadt Basel von 1521 bis 1798," *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 53 (1954): 60. A list of the members of the Kleiner Rat during that year is printed in Ekkehart Fabian, *Geheime Räte in Zürich, Bern, Basel und Schaffhausen: Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Staatskirchenrechts- und Verfassungsgeschichte der vier reformierten Orte der Alten Eidgenossenschaft (einschließlich der Züricher Notstandsverfassung). Mit Namenlisten 1339/1432–1798* (1800), *Schriften zur Kirchen- und Rechtsgeschichte: Darstellung und Quellen*, no. 33 (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1974), p. 428.

¹⁵ Basel SA, Protokolle, Kleiner Rat, Bd. 16, f. 154^v, June 9, 1619; and Buxtorf to Waser, Basel, June 15, 1619, Zürich ZB Ms F 167: 47.

¹⁶ "Non tantum ob spectata circumcisionem, sed et propter librum judaicum, cujus impressionis ego sim author." *Ibid.*

¹⁷ The project was completed between July 12 and August 10, 1619. Prijs, *Die Basler Hebräischen Drucke*, p. 334.

¹⁸ "Sunt qui dicant, et me cum libro ejici debere." Buxtorf to Waser, Basel, June 15, 1619, Zürich ZB Ms F 167: 47.

¹⁹ The Jewish defendants were apparently given no chance to speak on their own behalf.

him and the younger König 100 *Reichstaler* each for their participation in the incident²⁰. The Kesslers were ordered to spend two days and nights in jail. Gläser was also jailed until the council could decide his case²¹.

Ludwig König the elder then appealed to the council on behalf of the Jewish workmen. He begged the council to be lenient and to allow them to complete the Bible edition in time for the Frankfurt autumn book fair. Although it is not explicitly stated, König presumably argued that the council's refusal to permit the book's completion would be a severe financial blow to him. The council decided that the Jews would be allowed to stay in Basel until their work was completed. They were to live in the houses of König and Buxtorf who would also pay their living expenses. Once the Bible edition was printed, they would be expelled from the city. Abraham Braunschweig was sentenced to pay a fine of 400 *Reichstaler* because he was responsible for the whole incident. Mordecai Gumplin and Elijah b. Judah were ordered to be released without further penalty²². Another Jew, Abraham b. Solomon, was expelled from the city²³.

The city council's vengeful attitude toward Buxtorf and the other defendants bears closer examination. Their verdict could well have been influenced by an "offence" against their dignity caused by a Jewish convert in Basel scarcely two weeks before. Jacob Noah, a convert from Bohemia who had undergone catechism instruction for five to six months²⁴, was baptized on May 18 in Basel's main church by Jo-

²⁰ Buxtorf's annual salary at Basel university was only 150 Pounds per year. See Basel SA, Universitätsarchiv C1, "Archivum Academicum I: 1459–1634," fols. 181^{r-v}, and Rudolf Thommen, *Geschichte der Universität Basel, 1532–1632* (Basel: C. Detloff, 1889), pp. 50–51. Since a Reichsthaler was worth roughly two Basel Pounds, Buxtorf had been fined over a year's wages. Andreas Staehelin, *Geschichte der Universität Basel 1632–1818, Studien zur Geschichte der Wissenschaften in Basel*, vols. 4–5 (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1957), pp. XVIII–XIX.

²¹ The council ordered Gläser released on June 19, and did not punish him further. Basel SA, Protokolle, Kleiner Rat, Bd. 16, fol. 158^v, June 19, 1619. Heinrich a Diest escaped punishment because he had already left the city on June 15 or 16 to carry Buxtorf's letter to Waser. Buxtorf to Waser, Basel, June 15, 1619, Zürich ZB Ms F 169: 47.

²² Basel SA, Protokolle, Kleiner Rat, Bd. 16, f. 156^v–157^v, June 16, 1619.

²³ Basel SA, Protokolle, Kleiner Rat, Bd. 16, f. 157^v. Presumably Abraham b. Solomon was either a guest or had performed the circumcision; he is mentioned only here in the records.

²⁴ Buxtorf mentioned this convert in a letter to Waser. "Sonsten haben unsere Prediger auch alhie ein Judischen Knaben von 16 oder 17 Jahren, welchen sie nun biß in zwei Monat im Christlichen Glauben underruchten der meinung ihn hernach zu tauffen, und zu einem handwerck verdingen, welches er ernstlich begehrt." Basel, February 3, 1619. Zürich ZB Ms F-167: 46^{r-v}.

hannes Wollebius, the chief pastor of the city²⁵. He had been apprenticed to a bookbinder at city expense²⁶. Shortly afterwards he was punished for laziness by his master and fled the city²⁷. By leaving Basel he not only “cheated” the city council of money already paid to his master but also cast doubt on the sincerity of his conversion in the eyes of the city’s clergy. The clergy’s irritation over this “insult” is perhaps reflected in the fact that the city’s ministers submitted the complaint against Buxtorf and his codefendants. As Basel had virtually no Jewish inhabitants and did not depend on the Jews in any significant way for its prosperity, the city council could indulge its fury at the expense of a few Jews who had acted in all innocence.

Buxtorf was no less convinced than the council that Judaism was a false religion. He told Kaspar Waser that he had attended the circumcision in order to testify to his Christian faith. Either at the time of the circumcision or subsequently he had told the Jews that they were “spiritually blind” and needed a “circumcision of the heart.” He had tried also to make clear to them the grace of God through the Christian gospel. Buxtorf thought that the practice of circumcision was evidence of the Jew’s spiritual blindness, since it indicated that they still considered themselves to be God’s chosen people. They had failed to see that the Messiah had come and gone, that God’s blessing

²⁵ “D(en) 18. May Judeu(m) baptizavit Johannes Wollebius Antistes, ei(ue) nomen Cristiani imposuit. Testib(us) D(omino) Jac(obus) Mayero (ecclesiae) Elisabethae ministr(o), D(omino) Joh(anne) Jac(obo) Gernlero, D(omino) Wernero Frey. Baptizatus erat et(atis) 19 an(no).” Basel SA, Kirchenarchiv W 12, 2 fol. 260^v. The Martinskirche fulfilled some functions of the Basel Münster and this reference comes from its baptismal register. Prof. Hans Rudolf Guggisberg of Basel University kindly provided me with this reference.

²⁶ “Solchen Juden, welchen zum Zweck des Uebertritts zur christlichen Kirche der Aufenthalt einem Schweizer Orte gestattet wurde, gewährte man alsdann auch ebenso wie in Deutschland, den Unterhalt auf öffentliche Kosten während der Unterrichtszeit.” J. F. A. de Le Roi, *Die evangelische Christenheit und die Juden unter dem Gesichtspunkte der Mission geschichtlich betrachtet*, vol. 1: *Von der Reformation bis zur Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Karlsruhe and Leipzig: H. Reuther, 1884), p. 135.

²⁷ “Nachdeme dieser Proselyt, auf Unkosten einer Hohen Obrigkeit allhier, zu einem Buchbinder, um dessen Profession zu erlernen gethan, von diesem aber wegen seines Unfleisses bestraft worden, hat er ohne die Lehrzeit auszuhalten, von hier sich wiederum wegbegeben.” Hans Rudolff Merian, *Christliche Predigt Über die Wort des Apostels Pauli Rom. Cap. XI. v. 21. 22. 23. Gehalten in dem Münster zu Basel, Den 24. Julii im Jahr MDCCXL. Als Ein Jüdischer Proselyt, Allda getauft worden*, (Basel: Johannes Pistorius, 1740), p. 43. Merian is the earliest account containing the young man’s name and nationality. A copy of the sermon is preserved in Basel UB, call no. Ki Ar G IV 6, No. 29. Ulrich’s recounting of this incident is taken from Merian’s, *Sammlung*, pp. 308–309. See also Wurstisen, *Bassler Chronik*, p. 592.

now rested on the Church, and his wrath had been poured out upon the Jews²⁸. Nonetheless, by attending as Jewish ceremony Buxtorf did not think that he was condoning unbelief. His conscience was clear on the matter²⁹.

Buxtorf's reaction to the treatment he had received from the council and from his fellow citizens was predictable. "What an honor, what a reward for my tremendous labors³⁰!" He was angry enough to consider leaving the city entirely to accept a professorship at Heidelberg³¹. Buxtorf did not discuss the injustice done to Abraham Braunschweig or the other Jewish guests at the circumcision, but judging from the arrangements he made with Gläser he saw nothing wrong with Abraham's wish to have his son circumcised. Although he disagreed with the religious significance assigned to it by Jews, he thought that so long as the ceremony was permitted by the city authorities he had no quarrel with it.

Buxtorf's presence at the circumcision, in contrast to the council's vindictive denunciation of it, is indicative of his correct and perhaps friendly relations with the Jews with whom he worked. According to Tossanus, Buxtorf would periodically invite Jews to eat in his home in order to discuss his questions about Jewish beliefs and practices³². That these conversations took place at all reflects the trust which Buxtorf's Jewish acquaintances had in him as a person. One even spoke with Buxtorf about a Jewish convert who had returned to Judaism, an extremely sensitive topic³³. Had he been rabidly anti-

²⁸ Buxtorf expressed himself most forcefully on this point in his unpublished work, "Aus was Ursachen die Juden andere Völcker alzeit gehasst unnd veracht haben," Basel UB Ms A IX 78, fols. 13^v–21^v.

²⁹ "Interim potestne Christianus salva conscientia circumcissione spectare, eo fine, ut reprehendat eorum abusum, quod feci publice, ut ad circumcissionem cordis eos reducat, quod itidem feci, ut ex ipsorum traditionibus humanis, et caecitate horrenda Dei ira in ipsius cosnoscat, gratiam Dei in Christianis pro luce verbi Dei praedicat, et caet. cogita." Buxtorf to Waser, s. 1., June 15, 1619, Zürich ZB Ms F 169: 47^v.

³⁰ "En honorem, en praemium pro immensis laboris." Ibid.

³¹ Georg M. Lingelsheim to Johannes Buxtorf, Heidelberg, November 1, 1619. Basel UB G I 60: 11–12, and Karl Buxtorf-Falkeisen, *Johannes Buxtorf Vater, Prof ling. hebr. 1564–1629, erkannt aus seinem Briefwechsel* (Basel: C. Detloff, 1860), pp. 31–2.

³² Daniel Tossanus, *Johannis Buxtorfii . . . Vita et Mors* (Basel: Ludwig König, 1630), p. 10 wrote: "Judaeorum etiam conversationem adhibuit, qua factum est, ut propriis sumptibus saepe per aliquot menses Judaeos in aedibus aleret, & ab iis quicquid secretioris & reconditoris doctrine quicquid rituum & Ceremonium Judaicarum est rimaretur successu plane suggerunt ad omnem memoriam illustrissima."

³³ "Es ist zu Seltz . . . ein Jud welchen die andere Juden uberaus rhümen von grosser geschicklichkeit und wissenschaftt, und wie er die Christen an vielen Orten

Jewish they would hardly have eaten with him, much less discussed their religion. Even seen against this background of trust, however, Abraham Braunschweig's invitation must have been an unusual gesture of friendship.

Buxtorf's theological argument with Braunschweig is one of the two recorded instances when he ever discussed Christianity with a Jew. The other occasion had been many years previously, when a Jew with a troubled conscience had come to Buxtorf to talk about religion. The man died in 1616, still a Jew³⁴. Whatever else may be said about Buxtorf he was not a terribly active "missionary to the Jews"³⁵. Buxtorf's account of his exhortation to Braunschweig should be treated with caution, however, since it is known only from his letter. It could have been a rationalization of his actions after the fact. In any case whatever he said to Abraham Braunschweig at the circumcision did not end their relationship. Johann Buxtorf II mentions book trade business that he conducted with Braunschweig in his correspondence after his father's death³⁶.

Buxtorf's understanding of appropriate Christian behavior toward Jews differed markedly from the city council's views. He was hardly a rebel against governmental authority since he sought permission for the circumcision ceremony. His relations with the Jewish workmen were highly unusual³⁷ although permitted by Basel law and the city council. His close association with Jews had, however, aroused the suspicions of his fellow citizens. The Hebrew Bible edition which he thought would further the study of the Old Testament among Christians was considered a "Jewish book" by many Baslers. While

mit disputieren überwunden hab . . . Daher mir von meinem Judischen mit Corrector alhie, in ein Ohr vertrauwet worden als wenn man denselben im argwohn halte, es seye der, welcher sich bei euch (i.e. in Zürich) hat tauffen lassen." Buxtorf to Kaspar Waser, Basel, February 3, 1619, Zürich ZB Ms F-169: 46'.

³⁴ Johannes Buxtorf, *De Abbreviaturis Hebraicis Liber novus & copiosus: Cui accesserunt Operis Talmudici brevis rescencio, cum ejusdem librorum & capitum Indice. Item Bibliotheca Rabbinica nova, ordine alphabetico disposita*, ed. Johannes Buxtorf II (Basel: Ludwig König, 1640), pp. 102. The man also spoke with Amanus Polanus, a professor on the Basel theology faculty.

³⁵ Pace Heutger, "Johannes Buxtorf," pp. 78–81, who suggests that *Juden Schul* reflects Buxtorf's own extensive involvement in Jewish proselytism.

³⁶ M. Kayserling, "Richelieu, Buxtorf Père et Fils, Jacob Roman. Documents pour servir à l'histoire du commerce de la librairie juive au XVII^e siècle." *Revue des études juives* 8 (1884): 79.

³⁷ The Jewish workmen's association with Buxtorf also came quite close to violating rabbinical norms for dealing with Christians. See Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times*, *Scripta Judaica*, no. 3 (Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 38–41.

Buxtorf thought his attendance at the circumcision gave him an opportunity to preach the gospel, the city council understood it as participation in the rite of another religion, encouraging the Jews in their “false faith.”

The circumcision of 1619 is the best known incident in the life of Johannes Buxtorf I. While Buxtorf is clearly an exceptional figure and had unusual opportunities to work closely with Jews, his attendance at the circumcision and its consequences illustrate both the possibilities and limitations of Jewish-Christian relations during this period in Germany and Switzerland.

Appendix

Johannes Buxtorf I to Kaspar Waser, Basel, June 15, 1619
Zürich ZB Ms F 167: 47.

S.P. Literas tuas, Wasere carissime, heri a tuo Gatto accepi, ipsique mea studia et officia obtuli, quae non deerunt, ubi opus eis habuerit. De biblijs Venetis in nuperis nundinis Francofurtensibus, nec sermo, nec sonus, nec vox ulla fuit, unde suspicio orta, impeditum fuisse. Nunc aliter ex tuis intellexi. Nos ad duos menses possemus absolvere, sed horrendum patimur paroxysmum, Abrahami illius correctoris causa invectum. Ipsi natus hic in urbe fuit filius: ad eum circumcidendum in urbe nostra debuit impetrare permissionem capitum vel senatus, me alijsque serijs monitoribus. Pridie circumcisionis dixit se impetrasse firmiter, a praefecto lictorum penes quem ante hac fuit in judaeos potestas. Circumciso instituitur, ego interfui, una cum D. Henrico a Diest, praesentium latore. Ministeri ecclesiae rem ad senatum deferunt: judaei captivi ducuntur: uxor Abrahami judaei urbe ejicitur cum infante. Ego in magna invidia apud omnes, non tantum ob spectatam circumcisionem, sed et propter librum judaicum, cuius impressionis ego sim author. Nunc exspecto, cras aut die sabbathi, senatus sententiam in me et judaeos. Hoc certum, judaeos omnes (tres typographiae ministros, quibus antea facultas a senatu concessa) expulsum iri, et ita liber jacebit, qui pene in fine est. Sunt qui dicant, et me cum libro ejici debere. En honorem, en praeminum pro immensis meis laboribus. Ita sum animo perturbato ob tam iniqua hominum judicia, ut quo me vertam nesciam. Forte erit medium, ut alio in loco majori me honore vel gratitudine Deus affecturus sit pro hac ignominia. Interim potestne Christianus salva conscientia circumcisionem spectare, eo fine, ut reprehendat eorum abusum, quod feci publice, ut ad circumcisionem cordis eos reducat, quod itidem feci, ut ex ipsorum traditionibus humanis, et caecitate horrenda Dei iram in ipsis cognoscat,

gratiam Dei in Christianis pro luce verbi Dei praedicat, et caet. Cogita et aliquid pro me consolando rescribe.

Hunc a Diest, quem et ante novisti, alterum Samuelem Rizio illius Rizij qui Synodi assessor fuit, filius, honestissimus et doctissimus juvenes tibi commendo. Raptim 15 Jun. 1619.

Tuus J. Buxtorfius

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