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JAMES W. LOWRY

## **JOHANN LUDWIG RUNCKEL, A MAN CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE**

### **THE 1711 BERN EXODUS OF AMISH AND REISTIANS**

I invite you to journey with me back into the past. I invite you to look with me, in your mind's eye, at a scene in the city of Bern, Switzerland, on July 13, 1711 – a little over 300 years ago. The world was very different then, different from our materialistic, individualistic, unbelieving world.

We are at the side of the Aare River, which flows around Bern. A rather large crowd of people have gathered at the side of the river. Five boats have been built to transport prisoners and exiles, but the authorities have managed to find persons to fill up only four of them – with men, women, children, some new born babies, some crippled persons, some aged. Too many boats, but not enough people. But four boats are here in Bern, and one is being loaded over in Neuenburg. The persons on these boats are, from their appearance, mostly simple, farm people. Some have been brought here from prison. They have not many possessions with them, so that one might not suspect that they were emigrating from the Canton of Bern never to return. Civil magistrates, armed guards, and officials from the Reformed church oversee the loading of the boats. There is some confusion, some disagreement about who is to go on which boat although they are all going to the same destination. A gentleman, apparently upper class from his dress, is assisting in loading the farm families, at times giving orders somewhat abruptly, even sharply.

But when boarding is complete, most of the adult men on three of the boats have rather long, untrimmed beards; on the other boat most of the men have trimmed beards, not so long. Three of the boats have adherents of Jacob Ammann, Amish passengers; the one has adherents of Hans Reist, Reistians (now called Mennonites in America). The boat over in Neuenburg has only Amish passengers. There is some weeping on the boats. On the faces of those who remain on the shore, especially of state church officials, there are some expressions of satisfaction as the boats finally push off downstream. The boat from Neuenburg meets the other four at Wangen. Then the boats travel on together.

On July 16 the five boats stop at Basel, take on a few more passengers, and the same finely dressed, important-looking gentleman, who has again reappeared, arranges the people on four boats, instead of five. So they will travel on only four boats in order to save expense. The gentleman speaks some angry words and threatens some men on the Reistian boat, who seem to want to get off, but then

they remain on the boat.<sup>1</sup> The four boats continue on their trip down the Rhine. On July 24 the boats pass Mannheim.<sup>2</sup> At various points in the Palatinate, people leave the one boat, the Reistian boat, and stay behind, although they had promised officials in Bern not to do that. Those on the Amish boats remain on the boats.

The people on these vessels have never been out of sight of the Swiss mountains, and the changes of scenery along the Rhine are astonishing to them. As the days go by, they leave the lofty mountains behind, they pass neat vineyards ranked in rows along the hills, broad farm fields, and the land flattens out more and more. Finally, after numerous days, they are in level Dutch landscape and see many boats, many windmills. They are amazed to catch sight of the sail of a boat in the distance seemingly heading in a straight line across flat, black fields, rich and green. “How easy the farmers must have it here,” think those who have had to scythe hay on the mountainside, who at times have worked in a field so steep, that if the farmer were not careful, he could fall out of the field.

On August 2 the boats are at the Dutch city of Muiden on the Zuider Zee. Some rather elegant gentlemen board the boats and speak to the exiles in a strange sort of German, somewhat as the government officials and Reformed preachers in Bern speak, *die hoche Sprache*, but a German strangely pronounced, rather hard to understand. The fine gentlemen seem to be saying, “Welcome on Dutch soil.” Welcome on Dutch soil? They were not even fit to live in Switzerland! Now is this man saying they are welcome?

Who are these elegant gentlemen? They are *Doopsgezinden*. What’s that? That means “baptism-minded.” That’s the same as we Täufer-Brüder in the Canton of Bern. Oh, all this is difficult to believe!

Soon the boats are in the Amsterdam harbor, then at the Zandhoek in Amsterdam. Here the exiles disembark. They have been provided with two large warehouses<sup>3</sup> to live in, which are located not far from a canal. Here the 346 exiles lived, slept, and worshipped for two weeks, while decisions were made about where they were to settle – Swiss farm families in strange, cosmopolitan, worldly Amsterdam. There are many *Doopsgezinden* in the city – such elegant Mennonites! Many Mennonites come to see the dedicated, zealous refugees, who strike the *Doopsgezinden* as perhaps a bit crude, but so serious, so devoted to God in Bible reading and prayer. At the doors of the warehouses collection boxes are fastened temporarily; into the boxes the *Doopsgezinden* drop money for the support of the homeless outcasts.

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<sup>1</sup> This information is from a document listed in J. G. DE HOOP SCHEFFER, *Inventaris der Archiefstukken berustende bij de Vereenigde Doopsgezinde Gemeente te Amsterdam*, Amsterdam, 1883, 1884, that is, A 1341. The documents listed by DE HOOP SCHEFFER are kept in the Stadsarchief Amsterdam, and hereafter will be listed, for example, as SAA 565 A 1341.

<sup>2</sup> SAA 565 A 1396c, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> “in een mouterij [malting plant] de Oliphant op het Realeneiland.” JAAP BRÜSEWITZ, “Van Deportatie naar Emigratie” (Th.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 1981), 74. This is based on the “Aantekeningen”, a manuscript in the hand of Jacob Vorsterman, page 34, from August 3, 1711 (SAA 565 A 1010). Also SAA 565 A 1392, page 219 gives “2 Pakhuisen”.

All the *Doopsgezinden* are very kind, very friendly. Gradually, the Swiss begin to notice some differences among them. They were not all so elegant, not all dressed in such fine clothing. There are certain ones who are inviting them, who so especially want the Swiss to come and live in their part of the country – they are called Old Groningen Flemish Mennonites. There is wealthy Steven Abrahamsz Cramer from Deventer, Old Groningen Flemish deacon;<sup>4</sup> and there is his wealthy nephew, Alle Derks, bishop of the Old Flemish in Groningen. The faith of the Old Groningen Flemish was a little different from some other *Doopsgezinden*; they had maintained a strictness, a devotion to original principles, the old ground and foundation, that others were losing in the Netherlands. They were similar to the Amish in their practice of footwashing and shunning. The Amish *did* move to their part of the Netherlands, and settled in Kampen and Deventer with Daniel Richen as bishop; and in Groningen and Sappemeer with Hans Anken as bishop.<sup>5</sup> The few Reistian families went to Harlingen in Friesland. Specifically, 126 Amish to Groningen/Sappemeer; 116 Amish to Deventer; 87 Amish to Kampen; and 21 Reistians to Harlingen/Gorredijk.<sup>6</sup>

## THE BACKGROUND OF THE DEPORTATION

What led up to this exile under compulsion, this dramatic journey, which lasted from July 13 till August 2, 1711? In a sense, it was part of a long struggle beginning in Zurich, much earlier, in 1525 with the inception of the Anabaptist movement, which very soon spread to Bern and took deep root also there. At the time of the Reformation Zurich and Bern were two major Swiss Cantons which became Protestant, who were plagued, as they thought, with Anabaptist minorities. Finally, by 1660, Zurich had succeeded in eliminating the native Anabaptist minority.

But Bern was not so successful. The Bernese government had not been as well-organized and systematic as that of Zurich and perhaps there had been more

<sup>4</sup> PIET VISSER, *Some Unnoticed Hooks and Eyes: The Swiss Anabaptists in the Netherlands*, in: *Les Amish: origine et particularismes 1693-1993/ The Amish: Origine and Characteristics 1693-1993*, édité par l'AFHAM, Ingersheim 1996, 98; BONNY RADEMAKER-HELPERICH, *Een wit vaantje op de Brink: De geschiedenis van de Doopsgezinde gemeente te Deventer*, Deventer 1988, 105.

<sup>5</sup> VISSER 102.

<sup>6</sup> These numbers come from "Swiss Mennonites in the Netherlands," ME IV, 672-673 (see also 420-421). However SAA 565 A 1396c (mentioned in note 2 above) is a Dutch translation of a list which must have actually traveled with the vessels since it tells when various passengers left the ships, and gives dates when the ships touched places along the way (from this the dates given in the above account have been taken) and the following list of those who actually arrived in Amsterdam and were resettled from there:

226 to Deventer
100 to Groningen
18 to Harlingen (Reistians)
1 to Haarlem (student)
1 woman died here

346



Anabaptists in the mountainous countryside. With renewed determination, church and state again began a new campaign.

In the spring of 1710, 53 Bernese Täufer with prominent elder, Bendicht Brechtbühl, were brought down the Rhine as prisoners by a Mr. Ritter and soldiers, headed for America. Because of the appeals of the Dutch Mennonites to the States General of the Netherlands, the Täufer were released as soon as they reached Dutch territory at Nijmegen. The government of the Netherlands said that they did not permit people to be imprisoned in their lands because of religion. So Bern's attempt in 1710 at a forced deportation was a complete failure.

But Bern would not give up. Again, in 1711, the main focus of our attention in this discussion, government and church machinery were moving to rid the canton of its Täufer inhabitants.

For more than a half century the Dutch Mennonites (*Doopsgezinden*) had been interceding on behalf of their Swiss fellow believers. They had formed a committee, called the Committee for Foreign Needs, (*Commissie voor Buitenlandse Nooden*) from the various Mennonite churches to help in times of emergency. They had had wind of what was happening in 1710 and had asked help of the States General of the Netherlands, the governing body of the country. Hence the 1710 deportees were released as soon as they reached Dutch soil at Nijmegen.<sup>7</sup>

#### JOHANN LUDWIG RUNKEL

Now leaving behind the imaginative recreation of events of July and August 1711, let us focus on the upper class gentleman who appeared to be giving directions at the boarding of the ships of Anabaptist refugees. The gentleman was Johann Ludwig Runckel, a professional diplomat, Dutch ambassador<sup>8</sup> of the States General of the Netherlands to Switzerland at Schaffhausen.

Runckel began as secretary to the Dutch envoy extraordinary, Petrus Valkenier,<sup>9</sup> at Schaffhausen in 1694 and continued at various posts at Schaffhausen, Bern and Neuenburg down to 1711,<sup>10</sup> the year under discussion. He was a careful

<sup>7</sup> On March 18, 1710, 56 Anabaptist prisoners left Bern under guard. BRÜSEWITZ, 30. 33. LAVATER, 81.

<sup>8</sup> Called "Resident" and "Secretaris."

<sup>9</sup> Cf. M. BOKHORST, *Nederlands-Zwitserse Betrekkingen voor en na 1700. Eerste Deel* (1685-1697), Amsterdam 1940, XVI, XXIII, 112-114, 142-143. Petrus (Pieter) Valkenier (1641-1721) himself was heavily involved in helping and resettling Waldensian and Huguenot refugees. ALBERT DE LANGE and GERHARD SCHWINGE (eds.), *Pieter Valkenier and das Schicksal der Waldenser um 1700* [Waldenserstudien 2], Heidelberg 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Runckel was secretary to the Dutch envoy extraordinary, Petrus Valckenier, at Schaffhausen in 1694 and from 1701 to 1702, and in addition was chargé d'affaires in 1701, was secretary at Schaffhausen in 1704 and 1705, was commissioned embassy secretary at Schaffhausen June 2, 1707, and December 24, 1711. He was in Bern in May 1706 and January 1707 and at Neuenburg in August 1707. SCHUTTE, 153 and 466.

administrator in attention to detail and accustomed to polished political negotiations, where the parties involved were quite courteous, but at times perhaps cynical, not direct or even honest, in contrast to the Anabaptist farm people with whom he would soon have extensive dealings.

As his first existing letter to the Mennonites in Holland, the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* mentions one addressed to J. Beets in Amsterdam, reporting a renewed persecution, a fresh determination of the government of Bern to get rid of the Anabaptists. The government even threatened a few executions, as warning examples, if necessary. This letter was written from Bern on January 22, 1710.<sup>11</sup> The Mennonite Archives in Amsterdam contain more than 70 letters and documents from Runckel written to the Dutch Mennonite *Commissie voor buitenlandse nooden*. Runckel was from the Reformed Church (and perhaps somewhat under the influence of Pietism) as he obliquely reveals in a letter written from Bern, speaking of the Anabaptists he was trying to help:

The Täufer-Kammer (Anabaptist Commission) here is meeting at present, contrary to their previous habit, very frequently, certainly not to settle, to assist, or to deal with matters at hand purposefully, but mainly to demand the yet outstanding penalties or fines from the poor Anabaptists and from those who perhaps sheltered them contrary to official command. They want to oversee the expenses for capture and imprisonment in order that the illustrious Canton, they, the Commission, and also the officials might indeed not lose, omit, or forget anything regarding their fees, and the [Anabaptist] hunters regarding their arrests. How very much this harsh proceeding among my fellow religionists, who want to be called Reformed Christians, cuts me to heart, my pen is not sufficient to express.<sup>12</sup>

Sometime before, in the fall of 1709 or even earlier,<sup>13</sup> the Dutch Mennonites had taken up contact with this Johann Ludwig Runckel, Dutch ambassador to the Protestant cantons of Switzerland. He was normally located at Schaffhausen, but because of the troubles the Mennonites were having in Bern, with the approval of the Dutch government, he began what he hoped would be temporary residence at Bern. There, he negotiated with the leaders of the Great Council of Bern, appeared before the Council itself at times, and needed to meet with an appointed group, *Täufer-Kammer*, who were especially hostile to the Täufer. In addition to his regular duties as ambassador, Runckel carried on extensive correspondence with the Dutch Mennonite *Commissie voor buitenlandse nooden*, and with the Dutch government itself on Mennonite topics, and with the local Bernese officialdom. He also met with persons from the two Täufer factions, the Amish and the Reistians, and at times visited them in prison.

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<sup>11</sup> This exists in a Dutch translation: SAA 565 A 1255b.

<sup>12</sup> December 17, 1710, SAA 565 A 1295, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> SAA 565 A 1255b Translation of letter of January 22, 1710, with mention of earlier letter of October 26, 1709, to J. Beets (from Runckel according to DE HOOP SCHEFFER).

Repeatedly, he asked permission to return to Schaffhausen, but does not give an exact reason. But in a letter of February 21, 1711,<sup>14</sup> he thankfully reported to the Mennonites in Holland the safety of his newly born son<sup>15</sup> and of his wife, Johanna Esther Fischer,<sup>16</sup> around 80 miles away across the mountainous terrain. Hence Runckel's intercession for the Anabaptists involved some very personal sacrifice on his part.

The Reformed government and church thought they needed to get rid of the Anabaptist minority because of their divergent beliefs: The Anabaptists believed 1. that the church should be disciplined<sup>17</sup> – the Reformed in that era did too, but were not able to have satisfactory discipline with the whole population as members, that is, with a *Volkskirche*; 2. that Christians should not swear an oath, according to Jesus' teaching;<sup>18</sup> 3. that Christians could not be soldiers, according to Jesus' teaching;<sup>19</sup> and 4. that a Christian could not hold a government office, according to Jesus teaching.<sup>20</sup>

This last belief was especially irritating. Switzerland was the birth place of the Reformed Church, with Zwingli having made the break with the Catholics in Zurich, and hence was the mother church for all the Reformed congregations. The Swiss churches, it was believed, had successfully completed the corrections needed in the medieval church, had reestablished proper churches, whose members now ran the government. Hence, the Swiss protestant cantons were ideal Christian republics, a model for all of Europe. But the Anabaptists insisted that Christians could not have part in the government.

Both church and state in Bern wanted to get rid of them. After that deportation of 1710 failed, and very soon, much, much too soon, some of the deported Anabaptists were back in Bern. Now came a new campaign of imprisonment of Täufer and confiscation of their goods and property.

A plan was developed to settle the unwanted Bernese Täufer in faraway Prussia in the lands of King Friedrich Wilhelm, near Danzig where the countryside had been depopulated by a contagious disease, where farm houses, barns, and fields were left empty.<sup>21</sup> An alternative plan was checked into by Runckel to settle Täufer in lands neighboring Bern, where there were undrained swamps which could be brought under cultivation by the industrious, but unwanted, persons.

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<sup>14</sup> SAA 565 A 1317, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Johann Rudolf Runckel, born February 12, 1711. SAS, Geburtsregister, C II 06.01/03 and C II 06.01/04 report nine children born there named Runckel with the mother's name given as Johanna Esther Fischer of Reichenbach [near Zollikofen which is near Bern]. Thanks to Hanspeter Jecker for this information.

<sup>16</sup> SCHUTTE, 466. Runckel mentions his father-in-law, Mr. Fischer of Reichenbach, a gardener, travelling along with Anabaptist refugees, but only as far as Mainz in July 1711. SAA 565 A 1398.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 18: 15-17.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 5:33-37.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 5:38-48.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 7:1, Luke 22:25-26, Matthew 20:26-25.

<sup>21</sup> In December 1710, the plan came up to immigrate to Prussia, but was finally rejected October 14, 1711, after the Swiss had settled in the Netherlands. BRÜSEWITZ, 75.80.

However, this was found to be too expensive and time consuming.<sup>22</sup> Further, the Bernese government wanted the Anabaptists settled far away, not so near at hand where it would be easy for them to slip back into the country.

The Anabaptists themselves were quite uncertain, mostly opposed to settling in distant royal Prussia, where the contagion might easily be lurking in the abandoned farms, and under conditions of a lingering feudal system and serfdom. Distance appealed to the Bernese officials - and the disease? If the Täufer died of disease, well, then they would not come sneaking back to Bern!

From Amsterdam on August 10, 1710, the Committee for Foreign Needs sent out an appeal for funds to all the Mennonite congregations in the Netherlands, and a general meeting was held on November 5 where detailed reports on developments in Switzerland were given to 37 brethren present.

#### RUNCKEL GAINS AN AMNESTY

Earlier, Swiss authorities had been denying Anabaptists any opportunity of emigrating, or if Anabaptists did leave, they could not take possessions with them. Now on December 10, 1710, Runckel proposed an amnesty that Anabaptists be allowed to emigrate, to sell their properties and take the value with them as they left or even have it sent on to them later. Clerk François Fagel<sup>23</sup> of the States General of the Netherlands was very friendly to the Mennonites; he also sent a resolution for the Bernese government, strongly urging them to cooperate.<sup>24</sup> Runckel indignantly reported that local authorities were suddenly levying twice as many penalties and fines, as they suspected the opportunity for extorting money from the Anabaptists was possibly slipping away.<sup>25</sup>

Runckel repeated bitterly in letters of January 1711 that the earlier deported Anabaptists were returning to Bern and making matters worse for the Anabaptists and complicating negotiations with the government. So 75-year-old Samuel Reber returned, was caught, and, along with Hans Bürki, was sentenced to prison.

On February 11, 1711, the Mayor, and Council of Bern proclaimed an amnesty for the Anabaptists, which, after complaining about what the Täufer believed, provided the following: 1. They may leave and go to Holland or Prussia, but not

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<sup>22</sup> In August 1710, Runckel brings up plan of draining swamps (SAA 565 A 1271); in September 1710 Brechtbühl asks about plan (SAA 565 A 1275); on October 1, 1710, Runckel says he will investigate (SAA 565 A 1280); on October 25, 1710, an engineer asked by Runckel advises against the plan (SAA 565 A 1284); a document of November 1710 makes only brief mention (SAA 565 A 1285); in January 1711 Brechtbühl opposes draining (SAA 565 A 1299). Cf. contribution of Hanspeter JECKER in this volume.

<sup>23</sup> François Fagel (1659-1746) ME II, 287-288; A. J. VAN DER AA, *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden*, Haarlem 1862, Vijfde Deel 7; J. HERINGA, "François Fagel, Portret van een honnête homme," in: *Jaarboek Die Haghe*, 90(1980) 43-126.

<sup>24</sup> December 30, 1710.

<sup>25</sup> SAA 565, A 1295 (December 17, 1710).

to nearby Neuenburg or Valancing. (But this did not apply to those already exiled with confiscation of property.) 2. Prisoners will be released with bail. 3. Journey will be at their own expense. 4. Reformed children and spouses may go with their property but with loss of citizenship. 5. All property must be declared. Any property not reported to the Anabaptist Commission within the deadline will be confiscated. 6. All Anabaptist meetings are forbidden under penalty of heavy fines. 7. Anyone returning will be given severest punishment.<sup>26</sup>

Under these provisions preparations for departure began. Only some of the imprisoned Anabaptists were released. Runckel complained that he could not find Swiss Täufer who were capable of helping him make arrangements for the exodus. Only Daniel Richen, among them, seemed to be able to do this.<sup>27</sup>

The government made announcements in the state churches and posted notices that the Anabaptists leaving and their property had to be listed officially. Many Anabaptists were very hesitant and did not trust the government. The government threatened severe punishments for Anabaptists and for unreported property. Meanwhile the Mennonites in the Netherlands were collecting money and making ready for the exiles.

A final departure date was set for July 15. Only around 307 Täufer showed up to leave, 52 prisoners taken directly onto the boats, and this departure actually did take place on July 13.<sup>28</sup> This we depicted at the beginning of our discussion.

#### RUNCKEL'S VEXATIONS

Johann Ludwig Runckel – a man caught in the middle – is the topic. Although a diplomat with some years of experience, he was in an unusually irksome situation for negotiating. Only the Dutch in the distant Netherlands<sup>29</sup> did not make trouble for him, and even they wanted to keep him in Bern when he felt he should go back to Schaffhausen for the birth of a child. The Great Council, the Small Council of Bern, and the Anabaptist Commission wanted to get rid of all Anabaptists and kept changing the conditions under which they would be allowed to leave, sometimes making concessions, sometimes taking the concessions back, sometimes threatening to completely break off discussion. In exasperation,

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<sup>26</sup> MÜLLER, 296-297. Müller does not give origin of this material. This is like SAA 565 A 1312a, but perhaps it comes from a Dutch version, SAA 565 A 1776, February 11, 1711.

<sup>27</sup> SAA 656 A 1317.

<sup>28</sup> HANSPETER JECKER, Von der "Ausschaffung kriminalisierter Einheimischer" zur "Endlösung in der Täuferfrage, in: MH 32/33(2009/10) 255-256.

<sup>29</sup> When Runckel had done his work on behalf of the beleaguered Swiss Anabaptists, he asked the Mennonite committee in Amsterdam to whom he should present his bill of f 8.00 per day for his stay in Bern since he had worked most of that time for the Mennonites. Three Mennonite brothers traveled to The Hague to ask Fagel. Fagel said the Mennonites had had enough expenses with the resettlement of the Swiss. The government would pay it. But it was very necessary that the committee not say anything about it. A. VAN GULIK, *Uit de geschiedenis van de overkomst der vervolgede Zwitseren in 1710 en 1711*, in: DB 49(1909), p. 146 n.



Runckel himself made such a threat once. Some Reformed persons in Bern were sympathetic to the Anabaptists, but the Anabaptist Commission, most directly involved, expressed the greatest hostility. There were important and also very minor participants in the matter who stood to gain financially from fines and confiscated Anabaptist property, who worked to guide events so as to enhance their own wealth, as Runckel complained in the letter quoted earlier.

In an age different from ours (when many people do not care much about faith and do not believe in absolute values), but in an age when religious values were universally quite strongly held, the Anabaptists of Bern were especially steadfast and largely uncompromising in their commitment to their restitution of the New Testament church. Nearly two centuries of persecution by the state church in Switzerland had given them much practice in holding on and a willingness to sacrifice for what they believed was right. Their refusal to cooperate and to compromise was surely frustrating to Runckel, whose diplomatic training and experience led him to expect compromise in settling disagreements.

Runckel found the Amish party cooperating with the exile, but this was a matter of principle, not compromise; the Reistian party did not cooperate, also as a matter of principle. So after more than a very busy half year of negotiation, only a relatively small group showed up to board the boats for emigration, and some of them only because soldiers escorted them directly from prison to the boats.

Even then, new, unexpected disagreements arose, which Runckel had to negotiate. First of all the Reistians refused to get onto the boat with the Amish, as has been stated in other accounts of these events.

But some letters Runckel wrote at the time give direct insight into what was going on from day to day. There are especially two letters to the Dutch Mennonite Committee, who have asked him to help the persecuted Anabaptists in Bern and who are financing their departure. Runckel has had the responsibility of working out the details of the Täufer exodus and has had to deal with troubles on all sides – mostly from the Bernese government but some from the Anabaptists themselves, as just mentioned. And there were other unexpected problems.

The first letter was written by Runckel on June 13, 1711, one month before the departure actually took place. Runckel tells how the government officials are refusing now to receive him publicly. But further negotiations are not required since the steps needed for the departure are well advanced. He lists the eleven different foreign authorities from whom he is obtaining passports and permissions for the exiles to travel the length of the Rhine to Holland. He continues:

Concerning the extra high water, which will moreover increase rather than decrease because of the great amount of snow still lying in the mountains, we will need to have on every ship at the least five highly experienced shipmen, besides the pilots, as the route must be taken from place to place, if we do not want to put the people and ships in greatest danger. Although the previously mentioned Anabaptists could row quite well, but other-



wise they do not know the least how to manage the control of the ships, especially in swiftly flowing waters; also, the shipmen themselves would not rush headlong into danger.

These shipmen claim a much higher daily wage than was reported in my previous proposal. Accordingly, Mr. Ritter and I are working with them to negotiate in general concerning their maintenance and daily wage to the destination and back as well as the payment of expenses to Laufenburg and taking the pilots there and back, etc., in order to better settle the matter.

For the maintenance of the poor Anabaptists on the journey, that is to say, for their food, drink, straw, wood, etc., we calculate approximately 10 French stivers for each person and the rough calculation for the ship people with the above costs, such at least for 20 days, so that according to a rough estimate made for the ship people with the above costs for 5 ships comes to approximately 1550 rixdollars. The expense for 500 persons would run to approximately 1665 rixdollars. For this, however, everything shall be managed very exactly and a very precise and clear account kept by Mr. Ritter.

The so-called Oberländers,<sup>30</sup> or Amish, show up in a quite orderly manner, and accordingly the most persons reported in the accompanying list are from the Oberländer community. Those from the Lower Country or Reistians,<sup>31</sup> excluding the prisoners, remain steadfast in their obstinacy. Accordingly, disregarding my highly honored Sirs' circular letters, the writings of admonition and reminder from the Palatinate, from Crefeld, and other locations, my private letters, my dispatches to them both from Anabaptists as well as from Reformed gentlemen, my reminders, my admonitions, requests, pleading, and threatening, yet not one single soul of them has reported either to anyone of the illustrious Canton's officials, nor yet to me, but they have also undertaken and, in fact, made bold to employ everything humanly possible, to persuade the prisoners and to influence them, contrary to their pledged word, to also remain in the country and to keep themselves concealed therein in defiance of the illustrious government, my highly honored Sirs, and me. In this manner they have achieved their purpose so that until now no one imprisoned from this congregation wants to indicate to me even the number of his family to be taken along, much less indicate or claim the assets which were promised to be restored to them by the government except for two or three individuals. Indeed, in this matter earlier some quite unchristian and scolding words were allowed to be heard. Accordingly both I and the illustrious Government are extremely disconcerted on their behalf and scarcely know how to arrange matters further that these wretched people, entrapped in so terrible an obstinacy, might be rescued out of their immanent woe, trouble, and distress. This, however, as I look at it, is their own affair, and for the present is more to wish for than to hope for.

Meanwhile the great God knows what kind of trouble and work for me, what kind of grief, cross, and heartsickness these wretched people heap upon my soul. The chief cause<sup>32</sup> of all this recalcitrance is a certain "Trub-Peter," or Peter Habegger,<sup>33</sup> who at present is the most prominent leader of this congregation, and as a result according to his particular

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<sup>30</sup> *Oberländer* is a name that was early applied to the Amish party. BEACHY 1999, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Although Runckel personally knew and met with persons from both the Amish and Reistian parties, he consistently spells Reistian with a puzzling "L" as Leÿstisch. He uses this spelling also in document SAA 565 A 1331.

<sup>32</sup> This problem is mentioned by MÜLLER on pages 317-318.

<sup>33</sup> A farm near Trub is known to have belonged to the Habegger family, according to Leroy Beachy in conversation on November 29, 2010.

thought, particular pleasure, and particular wish he leads and directs all the others, and also will plunge them with himself into the ditch that he has prepared. His helpers are a certain “Weedt Christen,” Peter Spaar, Hans Gärber in Aschpy,<sup>34</sup> Ulrich Säger, Peter Oberli, and Christen Jacob, also all preachers from this congregation, and so it appears that they have all conspired to their own disaster.

The illustrious [Anabaptist] Commission even told me the day before yesterday that Daniel Grimm, who was sent away the previous year, and Bendicht Brechtbühl have again stolen into the land, and with and alongside of the above mentioned [leaders] have advocated that no one should go out of the land. Accordingly the officials had demanded to know whether I knew anything about them. And after I had answered with no, and we consulted together a little about this, then we finally decided that in order to rescue the others, if possible, that without delay they exert themselves to arrest these two men and bring them here. Then the others might back down in response and perhaps yet show up; the two men might be deported, however, with those who are cooperative.

My highly honored Sirs may now decide themselves what will come out of this so terrible an obstinacy finally and whether such people deserve that their cause should be further espoused.<sup>35</sup>

Ironically, in this first letter, Runckel, who is to be the rescuer of the Anabaptists, feels himself compelled to agree to the arrest of two Anabaptist leaders, so that the wider release of many Anabaptists from the country could proceed. The second letter follows soon after, June 17,<sup>36</sup> also by Runckel to the Dutch Committee for Foreign Needs:

In hope that my last letter of the 13<sup>th</sup> of the present month has safely arrived [I] should present to my highly honored Sirs how that in accordance with the agreement made with the local Anabaptist Commission, it was arranged to seize and then to take to prison those men, who, as I previously reported, contrary to the desire of the government and their promised word, had stolen into this land. Under these circumstances Daniel Grimm succeeded in escaping<sup>37</sup> the hunters who were sent out, but Hans Bürki was captured, who is known to my highly honored sirs who was already for a long time suspected and sensed to be in the country. However, Bendicht Brechtbühl, praise to God, is not in the country. Bürki was captured and on last Saturday evening was brought here into the prison and until now is kept in severest confinement, especially since his sons and Daniel Grimm’s and in addition other men and women [apparently non-Anabaptists] had the impudence to resist the government’s servants at the time of his capture so that it almost came to blows. This, then, as is easy to suppose, did not improve the man’s matters in the least, but excessively worsened them in that it brought the government to force of arms, so that the prisoner has to thank God greatly that he was captured in the time of amnesty, not after its expiration, as was the plan of the Anabaptist Commission. But in this last plan without any mercy or any regard to his age, he would have been sent to the French galleys; in place of this, there is yet hope again that he can be banished with the others.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> There is an Aspi in Lauperswil near Langnau according to Hans Minder of Lauperswil, September 2, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> SAA 565 A 1334.

<sup>36</sup> SAA 565 A 1335.

<sup>37</sup> MÜLLER, 318.

<sup>38</sup> SAA 565 A 1335.

Runckel is relieved to report that Brechtbühl has not returned to Bern. While in Holland, Brechtbühl had promised the Dutch Mennonites, after some persuasion, not to return to Switzerland. He later asked to be released from the promise, but his fellow believers in Holland would not grant that. So he felt then that he should honor the promise since it was not made under compulsion.

After this important episode of 1711, Runckel did continue to work for the Dutch government as representative, with some activity on behalf of the Swiss Anabaptists but not so frequent or intense. Runckel was also “Resident” of the Duke of Württemberg at his death, which occurred in Schaffhausen on April 1 or 2, 1720.<sup>39</sup> Nine children had been born to his marriage, his oldest child having been born thirteen years before his death and there was a one-year old baby.<sup>40</sup> His widow wrote to the Mennonite Committee in Amsterdam, appealing for help on July 9, 1722, for herself and seven surviving children.<sup>41</sup> After that mention of Runckel disappears from the record.

#### CONCLUSION

Now to conclude, I want to present a little commentary on a conflict brought up in these two letters, a conflict exasperating (and no doubt puzzling) to Runckel, but which has continued through Anabaptist history in Europe and now in North America down to the present, that is, the differences between the Amish and the Reistian parties in the Swiss Brethren division. Johann Ludwig Runckel found himself at the intersection of several ethical disagreements within the Swiss Anabaptist movement.

The Amish were a new, reforming faction among those Anabaptists, mainly consisting of recently converted members according to Leroy Beachy’s study.<sup>42</sup> As newcomers in the movement, they were especially zealous in affirming and conserving a major original Anabaptist belief in separation from the world. As recent converts with a willingness to venture into a new faith, they were also ready to venture into a new geography and leave Switzerland. Further, one of the disagreements of the division between the Amish and the Reistians concerned truthfulness. The Amish felt that the Reistian party had failed to discipline a woman for not telling the truth. The Amish believed that making a promise not to come back to Bern, after being expelled, and yet returning, could be seen as

<sup>39</sup> Runckel’s widow in the letter of July 9, 1722, (see note below) says his death occurred on April 1 whereas the *Courant* says April 2. *AMSTERDAMSE COURANT*, April 13, 1720; SCHUTTE, 466.

<sup>40</sup> This further information from SAS about Runckel’s family is by the friendly courtesy of Hanspeter Jecker.

<sup>41</sup> SAA 565 A 1005 under the year 1719 and SAA 565 A 1005 Vol. II. Also letter from widow of Runckel on August 13 [July 9?], 1722 on p. 493 in the Record Book of the Church Council of the Lam and Toren church in Amsterdam, PA 1120 no. 175 of PESCHAR and B 870 [III] of DE HOOP SCHEFFER. Cf. HARRY PESCHAR, *Inventaris van de archieven van de Doopsgezinde Gemeenten Lam, Toren, Lam en Toren en de Verenigde Gemeente, 1593-1955*. Amsterdam 1990.

<sup>42</sup> BEACHY 2011, 116-117.

an offense against speaking the truth. If someone promised, and did not do what he had said, then he made himself a liar. So in this case such an expelled person should not come back to Bern. Tied to this was yet another major Anabaptist belief, the importance of brotherhood and mutuality. Accordingly, if others in the congregation had been forced to promise not to come back to Bern, it would only be brotherly to go along with them in their forced exile. Generally the Amish party, both innovative and conservative at the same time, was characterized by a desire to not compromise.

In the matter of telling the truth, the Reistians held that promises made under compulsion were not binding,<sup>43</sup> thus emphasizing an original principle of freedom of each to choose. (This contrasted with Calvinist beliefs in irresistible grace and God's sovereign will and perhaps this is related to the issue of freedom of conscience.)

Thus, the Reistians had arguments on their side of the division. It is true the Amish felt the Reistians had compromised, made some accommodation to the surrounding society. Over the years of conflict in Switzerland, some Anabaptists had established patterns of getting along with their neighbors – sometimes allowing their children to be taken to Reformed church for baptism, perhaps without overt consent, with the theory of not upsetting the balance.

Moreover, the Reistians wanted to stay in Bern because evangelism (a major Anabaptist emphasis) was so successful there — but this produced these new converts, as in the Amish party, who were sometimes too zealous, who wanted to carry out every principle rigorously.

Was the Reistian Party more rigorous in adhering to the statement of Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the Lord's,” as did the earliest Anabaptists from Zurich, later Hans Landis, and also some from Bern?<sup>44</sup> This was interpreted to mean that government of Bern, under God, could not forbid the Anabaptists to evangelize in their native country because both they and the land belonged to the Lord. Further, the Reistian party, believing that worldly governments were outside the perfection of Christ as the Schleithem Confession of Faith taught, could have suspected the alliance of the Dutch Mennonites with the Dutch government on their behalf and even the possible alliance of the Anabaptist-eating bear of Bern with the Prussian eagle<sup>45</sup> although we have no hint of that.

Or was the Amish Party more correct in adhering to the Dordrecht Confession of Faith (to which the church had agreed) where Article XIV says, “to flee, for the Lord's sake, from one city or country to another,” building on Matthew 10:23.<sup>46</sup> Weren't they following the example of Paul and Barnabas<sup>47</sup> when they

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<sup>43</sup> BEACHY 2011, 159 n. 186; 169 n. 187.

<sup>44</sup> JAMES W. LOWRY, Hans Landis: Swiss Anabaptist Martyr in Seventeenth Century Documents, Millersburg, Ohio 2003, 75 n. 17, 193; MARTIN HAAS, Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz, dritter Band: Aargau, Bern, Solothurn: Quellen bis 1560, Zürich 2008, 167-168.

<sup>45</sup> LAVATER, 95.

<sup>46</sup> Dordrecht Confession of Faith, Article XIV, Defense by Force.

<sup>47</sup> LAVATER, 95.

fled from Antioch to Iconium, shaking off the dust of their feet against them in Acts 13:51?

There were arguments on both sides. Which side had the better arguments? I close, leaving this question open.

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#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND OFTEN CITED LITERATURE

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DORDRECHT CONFESSION FAITH

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SCHUTTE

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## German Originals of Quotes from Runckel's Letters

**December 17, 1710.** Document A 1295.

Die hiesige Täufer Cammer versamlet sich nun mehro wieder Ihre bisherige gewohnheit gar fleißig, nicht zwaren umb die Sache warumb es dermahlen eigentlich zu thun, außzumachen oder zu befordern, sondern haubtsächlich umb die noch außständige Bußen oder straffen von denen armen Täuffern, und denenjenigen so solche wieder das Obrigkeitliche gebott etwann beherberget, einzufordern, und umb die gefängnus und fahungs-unkosten<sup>48</sup> zu reguliren, damit ein Lobl[iche]r Standt, Sie die Cammer wie auch die Ambtleüthe wegen ihren *Vacationen*,<sup>49</sup> und die Jäger wegen ihrer *capturen*<sup>50</sup> ja nichts verlieren, zurücklaßen oder vergessen mögen. Wie sehr mir dieses harte *procedere* unter meinen *Religions*-Verwandten, so *reformirte* Christen heisen wollen, zu hertzen schneide, ist meine feder nicht gnugsam umb außzutrucken.

<sup>48</sup> fahen="auffangen" (Early New High German).

<sup>49</sup> *Vacationen*, "fees" in plural (French).

<sup>50</sup> *Capturen*, "captures, arrests" (German).



**June 13, 1711.** Document # 1334t.

Wegen des extra Hohen Wassers, welches über dem wegen des vielen noch im Gebürg liegenden Schnees ehenter<sup>51</sup> zu- als abnehmen wird, werden Wir auff jedes Schiff nothwendig und auff's wenigste aussert denen Piloten, so mann auff der *route* von Orth zu Orth nehmen muß, fünff wohlerfahrne Schiffleuthe haben müssen, wann wir die Menschen und Schiff nicht in die gröste gefahr setzen wollen, indem die vormahls gemelte Täußer zwar wohl ruderen können, sonsten aber mit dem *maniement*<sup>52</sup> der Schiffen, insonderheit in rinnenden oder fliesenten Wassern, im geringsten nichts umbzugehen wissen, auch die Schiffleuthe selbstn sich nicht muthwillig in gefahr begeben wollen.

Diese letztere prætendiren<sup>53</sup> auch einen weit gröseren taglohn alß in meinem vormahls übersanden project vermeltet, dannenhero H[err] Ritter und Ich im Werck begriffen, mit denenselben überhaubt vor ihre kost und taglohn hin und her, wie auch die bezahlung der unkosten zu Lauffenburg, der hin und wider zu nehmen stehenden Piloten etc. zu tractiren, umb damit desto besser zu schlag zu kommen.

Für den unterhalt der armen Täußer unterwegs, *c'est à dire*,<sup>54</sup> für ihre speis, Tranck, Stroh, Holtz etc. rechnen wir *praeter propter*<sup>55</sup> 10 Frantzösische Stüber per haubt, und solches auff's wenigste It 20 tage, so daß nach einem gemachten ungefähren überschlag die Schiffleuthe mitt obigen kosten It 5 Schiff auff ungefehr 1550 R[eichs]Th[aler] die kost für 500 Personen aber auff 1665 R[eichs]T[haler] belaußen würden. Worbeÿ aber alles dennoch auff's genauweste menagiret, und von Herren Ritttern eine *præcise* und nette Rechnung solle gehalten werden...

Die von der so genanten Obern oder Ammanischen Gemeind, stellen sich gantz ordentlich ein, wie dann die meiste in nebengehenten Liste vormeldete Personen von den Oberen Gemeind seÿd: die von der Untern oder Leÿstischen Gemeind aber bleiben, außert den gefangen gewesenenen, alle auff ihrer halsstarrigkeit bestehen, so daß von denenselben Meiner Hochgeehrten Herren Circularen Schreibens, der Anmahnungs und Erinnerungs Schreiben aus der Pfaltz, von Crevelt und von anderen Orthen her, meiner particularen brieffen, meines Absendens so von Täußern als *Reformaten* Männern an dieselbe, meines Erinnerns, meines Vermahnens bittens, flehens und Betrohens unerachtet, sich nicht nur

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<sup>51</sup> "*ehet*."

<sup>52</sup> *Maniement* (French), "handling," "conduct."

<sup>53</sup> *Prætendiren*, "claim."

<sup>54</sup> "That is to say."

<sup>55</sup> *Praeterpropter*, "more or less" (Latin).

noch keine einzige Seele von denenselben weder beÿ eines  
Löbl[iche]n Stands Ambtleuthen noch auch beÿ mir angemeldet  
sondern sich auch unterstehen und erkühnen, ja alles anwend[en]  
was ihnen nur Mensch und möglich ist, umb die gefangen  
gewesene zu bereden und zu vermögen daß Sie, ihres  
gegebenen Worts unerachtet, auch im Landt bleiben und sich  
darinnen einer Löbl[iche]n Obrigkeit, Meinen Hochgeehrten Herren und  
Mir zu trutz vorborgen halten sollen. Womit Sie es dann,  
leÿder, so weit gebracht, daß auch bis auff diese stund noch keiner  
von denen aus dieser Gemeind gefangen gewesenenen mir nur die  
Anzahl seiner mitnehmenden *familie* anzeigen, vielweniger  
aber die ihnen von der Obrigkeit zu *restituiren* versprochene  
Mittel anzeigen oder *reclamiren* wollen, ausert 2 oder 3  
eintzigen. Ja es haben sich erstere *in hoc puncto* gantz un-  
Christlicher und schimpfflicher Wort verlauten lasen, so daß so wohl  
eine Löbl[ich]e Obrigkeit alß auch ich ihrentwegen über alle maasen  
verlegen, und kaum mehr wissen, wie immermehr die sachen anzustellen,  
damit mann diese in einer so grausammen halstarrigkeit  
verwickelte armseeliche Menschen auß ihrer bevorstehend[en] jammer  
Elend und Noth erretten möge...

welches aber, wie ich die sache ansehe, solche auch an und für sich  
selbsten ist, vor dis mahlen viel ehenter zu wünschen alß zu  
hoffen ist. Indessen weis der grose Gott, was Mir diese arm-  
seelige Menschen für Mühe und Arbeit für jammer, Creutz  
und hertzenleÿd auff meine Seele laden. Die haubtursache  
von aller dieser widerspänstigkeit ist ein gewisser Trub-Peter  
oder Peter Habhegger welcher anjetzo der fürnehmste Lehrer dieser  
Gemeindte ist, und demnach alle die andere noch seinem eigenen  
Sinn, eigenen Gefallen, und eigenen Willen führet und Leÿtet,  
auch solche demnoch mit sich in die von ihme verfertigte Grube  
stürzen wird. Seine helffers helffere seind ein gewisser Weedt  
Christen, Peter Spaar, Hanß Gärber im Aschpÿ, Ulrich Säger, Peter  
Oberlÿ und Christen Jacob auch alle Lehrer von dieser  
Gemeindt, so daß es scheint, daß sich solche alle zu ihrem Ungluck  
verschworen haben. Ja es hat Mir eine Löbl[iche]n Cammer vorgestern  
angezeigt, wie daß auch die vorm Jahr versante Daniel  
Grimm und Benedict Brächtbüchel sich wiederum in das Land  
geschlichen, und mit und nebenst obig vermeldeten sich dahin  
bearbeiten, daß ja niemand auß dem Land gehen solle, hat  
demnach zu wissen verlanget, ob ich etwas von ihnen wisse?  
Und nachdeme mit nein geantwortet und Wir unß ein wenig  
hierüber berathen, so haben Wir endlichen dahin geschlossen,  
daß, umb die andere, wo es immer möglich, zu *salviren*, mann  
sich ungesaumbt dahin bemühe, umb diese zweÿ Manner beÿ  
den Kopffen zu fassen und anhero zu bringen, damit die andere  
darab in sich gehen, und etwann noch anmelden, die 2 Männer  
aber mit denen gehorsamen wieder fortgeführt werden mögten.

Meine Hochgeehrte Herren schliesen nun hieraus selbst, was endlich aus dieser so grausamen Halsstarrigkeit entspringen werde, und ob dergleichen Leüthe meritiren daß mann sich ihrer ferners annehme...

**June 17, 1711.** Document A 1335t.

In Hoffnung mein letzteres vom 13ten *currentis* werde wohl eingekommen seÿn...[ich] Meinen Hochgeehrten Herren zugleich andienen sollen, wie daß der mit hiesiger Täußer Cammer genommenen Abred gemäß mann die Anstalt verfüget, die in meinem vorigen vermeldete und wieder der Obrigkeit Willen undt ihr gegebenes Wortt in hiesiges Land geschlichene Männer zu fassen und anhero in die Gefängnus zu bringen, worbey es dann dem Daniel Grimm annoch geglücket, daß Er denen außgesandten Jägern entrunnen, der Hanß Bürckÿ aber, welcher Meinen hochgeehrten herren bekandt...welchen mann schon längstens im Landt vermuthet und verspüret, anstatt des *Benedict Brechtbüels*, welcher Gott lob nicht im Landt, gefangen und verwichenen Sambstag abends anhero in die Gefängnus gebracht, und bis dahero auff das scharffeste verwahret worden, zumahlen da seine und des Daniel Grimms Söhne nebst anderen Männern und Weibern bey seiner gefangen nehmung sich erfrechet, denen Obrigkeitlichen Bedienten sich zu widersetzen, so daß mann darüber fast zu streichen kommen wäre, welches dann, wie leicht zu erachten, dieses Manns Sache im geringsten nicht gebesseret, sondern über alle maßen verböseret, indeme es die Obrigkeit gewaltig in Harnisch gebracht, so daß der Gefangene Gott höchstens zu dancken haben wird, daß Er noch in der Freÿheitszeit nicht aber nach derer verfliesung, wie es der Täußer-Cammer *Intention* gewesen, behändiget<sup>56</sup> worden, sintemahlen Er letzteren falss ohne alle Barmhertzigkeit und Seines Alters unerachtet auff die Frantzösche *Galleeren* wäre versandt worden, anstatt daß anjetzo noch Hoffnung daß solchen mit denen übrigen wiederumb werde versenden können.

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<sup>56</sup> "delivered, handed over."