

Heinrich Bullinger's Correspondence

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The correspondence of the Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), the successor of Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, is being edited at the Institute for Swiss Reformation History of the University of Zurich since 1964 and was until December 2020 financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the Reformed Church of Canton Zurich. The edition of Bullinger's correspondence is a text-critical edition with extensive annotations and a German summary of every published letter. So far 19 volumes and a supplemental volume 10A, comprising altogether 2887 letters written between 1524 and March 1547 have been published by the "Theologischer Verlag" of Zurich. From volume 7 onwards, letters having been edited since the nineteenth century in reliable editions are only provided in a German précis. This represents around 15% of the edited correspondence. Up to volume 14, each letter has been provided with a short summary, mentioning only the main issues treated in the letter. Since volume 15 however, each letter is provided with an exhaustive summary in order to facilitate the access to these mostly unpublished sources. The electronic edition, which allows advanced search options in the letters, affords free access to all these volumes published between 1973 and 2019. Volume 20, which is in print, contains 231 letters written between April and December 1547 and, in an Appendix, 11 new letters written between December 1523 and December 1546. Volume 20 should be available in print in the spring or summer of 2021.

Bullinger's correspondence with its 12000 letters (10000 addressed to him and 2000 written by him) is one of the largest surviving bodies of correspondence from the sixteenth century. It extends over a period of 51 years (1524 to 1575). Geographically, the network of this correspondence stretches from Scotland to Belarus and from Denmark to Italy. All in all, there are more than 1100 correspondents involved, originating from many different social classes: from kings, politicians and scholars to workmen with quite rudimentary literacy skills. Almost all of the letters were written in Latin (80%) and Early Modern German (20%), except occasional letters composed in French, Italian or Greek. Bullinger's correspondence affords a wealth of information on political, sociological, economical, biographical, climatological and astronomical issues and constitutes an invaluable source for the history of ideas and of culture. It provides precious and often unknown indications about contemporaneous prints, sometimes about their exact date of publication or about their author(s), if these prints appeared without date, anonymously or under a pseudonym.

This editorial undertaking, providing quite a lot of hitherto unpublished material, fits exactly in today's historical trend, which is especially interested in epistolography and networking. It would also lend itself very well to researchers devoted to the evolution of Latin and of Early Modern German during the sixteenth century. Due to its wealth and variety of information, its density (two letters every third day, so that for most events it is possible to compare different accounts), its extension over 51 years and over a large geopolitical territory, and given that letters afford a more intimate look into the past than contemporaneous printed books would be able to do, Bullinger's correspondence, accordingly, constitutes one of the most invaluable source of information concerning the history and culture of sixteenth-century Europe.

Reinhard Bodenmann, January 2021.