

Heinrich Bullinger Werke Zweite Abteilung, Briefwechsel, Band 17: Briefe von Juni bis September 1546. Reinhard Bodenmann, Alexandra Kess, and Judith Steiniger, eds.
Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2015. 548 pp. €145.

Briefe von Juni bis September 1546 constitutes another excellent volume in the ongoing series of Heinrich Bullinger's correspondence. It opens a window onto a momentous year within a transformative era, and the editors pull it off with precision. The textual apparatus, concluding index, introductory remarks, and modern German synopses at the start of each of the letters all facilitate careful research. A further great aid to research comes in the reminder that the correspondence is available not only in the present hard copy, but also in a free, searchable database via www.irg.uzh.ch/hbbw. (References to databases of related searchable material via the Zurich Staatsarchiv and the Zentralbibliothek are less helpful in that the editors make allusions but fail to specify actual web addresses.)

Reinhard Bodenmann gives readers their bearings at the outset of this volume by pointing to several salient features of the letters and of the events to which they refer. The outbreak of the Schmalkaldic War looms, unsurprisingly, very large. These letters show dynamic Swiss engagement within the empire and Europe more broadly, and as such they provide a necessary correction to much historiography that has heretofore commonly assumed isolationism on the part of the Alpine confederation. The letters illuminate an especially tight network among Zurich, Constance, Augsburg, and Basel. Heinrich Bullinger and his correspondents envisioned a double cause at hand—broadly pan-German and pan-Protestant. These two focuses were complicated to say the least. The Germanic cause not only involved strange bedfellows of republican councils with imperial princes, but it could also transcend religious differences in the face of a foreign, Habsburg emperor, viewed by many in these circles as subjugating native Germans with recourse to rapacious armies of Spaniards and Italians. Pan-Protestantism, for its part, still included bitter scorn for Martin Bucer and other “flesh-eaters” of Lutheran-leaning sacramentology. Other important themes that scholars will want to explore throughout these letters include the dynamic complexities of religious, ethnic, and political identities in sixteenth-century Europe; linguistic developments of early modern German (in various dialects); and the perceptions of Jewish minorities and of Ottoman Muslims.

It is also intriguing to ponder possible meanings within the sheer dearth of references to the otherwise enormously influential Catholic Council of Trent, then underway.

It is not a criticism to observe that this book is intended for a rather limited readership of specialists, and yet, that is the only obvious qualification I can articulate as to its overall usefulness and excellence.

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