37. May 1 (?), 1710. Translation of a report of Melchior Zahler of Frutigen, originally written in his own hand but translated into Dutch, about his imprisonment in Switzerland and deportation with other prisoners to America, which was thwarted by their release on April 9, 1710, at Nijmegen. He includes a list of fifty-seven names of those deported, with some further details.

[folio 1 verso]

Narrative of Melchior Zahler[[1]](#footnote-1)

concerning his imprisonment, etc.[[2]](#footnote-2)

[folio 2 recto]

In the year 1708 and 1709, around the month of March, the lords of the government of Bern published an order and a severe proclamation, which they had read in the pulpits of their jurisdiction everywhere, against the so-called Anabaptists or Mennonites, in which they forbade all their subjects, under threat of loss of goods, lands, privileges, and [of] exile from the country, to house us, to provide shelter, to offer food or drink, and ordered that if anyone discovers or sees an Anabaptist or Mennonite, he must apprise the minister or the local magistrate of it, placing thereon as recompense a tidy sum of money, for some ƒ 50, for others 100 rixdollars. They had their subjects swear that, if anyone of us receives food whether in a house or on the road, they will bind our hands and take us to the prison. This happened to me around this time, namely, for when I went to get some bread and wine for my ailing, pregnant wife, now deceased, at night around 10 or 11 o’clock, [I was asked] if I was an Anabaptist. When I didn’t deny it, they said that they had to be true to their promises so as not to perjure themselves on account of me, (otherwise, they would not do it). Thereupon they led me, with much shouting and swearing, a short way off; nevertheless I was set free this time by a good friend.

After that the lords of Bern had two or three persons taken to the city of Bern from each parish where Anabaptists were thought to be. They had to stay there for some time, away from their parish, at great cost to the people of the land, so that they could make us more hated and problematic for those people of the land because of the loss to them.

At the same time, many of our people left the country to go to Alsace,

Montbéliard, and Neuchâtel, so that it could not but be the case, that the oppressed refugees and exiles became very poor, seeing that everything was taken and stolen from most, so that nothing remained, and this contrary to all justice and reasonableness, and contrary to their own mandate that they had published.

In that time I, Melchior Zahler, also went to live in Neuchâtel. Then my brother-in-law, with my well-known friend named Hans German, had a trusted man request me verbally that I should again come to my property in the Bern region, after which I went to this well-known friend, who showed me the greatest friendship and love and wanted to hand over two of my children so that I could feed and clothe them. After that I wanted to visit my brother, sister, and my other children as well, and when I was with my brother and children, someone went to the minister and betrayed me, revealing everything, that is, the time and the night that I had returned. He told the minister about the clothing and everything, whereupon the minister that same evening sent three provosts, who arrested me and bound me, bringing me to that minister, who investigated my faith concerning infant baptism, the taking of oaths, the rule regarding excommunication, bearing the sword, and the office of government, and ordered that I be bound again and taken to Bern. This occurred on February 27, 1710. Before this I was imprisoned one other time, in 1706, as when I was imprisoned for three weeks in [ ][[3]](#footnote-3) and six weeks in the Hospital[[4]](#footnote-4) in Bern was locked up with my right hand fettered for a long time, and while I was fed with water and bread, I suffered much grief and sadness and affliction, on account of [folio 2 verso] first my being so falsely betrayed, and second their having robbed me of all my children and goods, taking from me, besides my five children, more than ƒ15,000 and moreover having exiled me from my country and haven of property and family and having deported me as a slave to America with the following company, and giving me not a stiver for the journey.

1 Hans Bürki,[[5]](#footnote-5) was imprisoned 30 Hans Ramseier

 in July 1708

2 Christian Sattler[[6]](#footnote-6) imprisoned 31 Jost Kapfer [Kopfler]

 1708

3 Isaac Baumgartner was 32 Hans Engel of Röthenbach

 imprisoned 1708 for the first

 time and 1709 a second time 33 Durs Rohrer, a deacon

4 Bendicht Brechtbühl imprisoned 34 Rudolf Stettler, a preacher

 January 12, 1709, a preacher 35 Michel Aeschlimann, deacon

5 Jacob Salfinger 36 Niklaus Baltzli of Bollingen

6 Uli Salfinger 37 Melchior Zahler of Frutigen was

 imprisoned on Feb. 27, 1710, and was

7 Peter Salfinger previously imprisoned in May 1706.

8 Caspar Bieri 38 Matthias Kräyenbühl

39 Bendicht Mutti

9 Christian Fankhauser 40 Bendicht Maurer of Diessbach

10 Christian Berger of Lauperswil 41 Hans Brönnimann

11 Daniel Moser[[7]](#footnote-7) of Langnau, a 42 Niklaus Moser, a preacher, is in

 preacher  prison

12 Uli Schmid of Langnau 43 Bendicht Nussbaum, died

13 Niklaus Blaser of Lauperswil 44 Peter Wüthrich [Widrick] of Trub

14 Peter Hofer at Ashornch(?)[[8]](#footnote-8) 45 Niklaus Lüthi of Lauperswil

15 Christian Kräyenbühl

16 Samuel Räber   The womenfolk are:

17 Uli Eichenberger 1 Katarina Aebersold

18 Peter Kohler 2 Elisabeth Gerber

19 Heinrich Wenger of Martisegg[[9]](#footnote-9) 3 Elisabeth Gerber of Schangnau[[10]](#footnote-10)

20 Christian Steiner, deacon 4 Elsbeth Krieg of Grosshöchstetten

21 Hans Jacob[[11]](#footnote-11) of Uetendorf 5 Elsbeth Steiner from Kurzenberg or

22 Jacob Neuenschwander Diessbach[[12]](#footnote-12)

23 Peter Thönen of Reutigen 6 Anna Schenk of Diessbach

24 Hans Gasser, a preacher 7 Barbara Fahrni

25 Hans Stübi, a deacon 8 Margret Engel of Diessbach

26 Hans Rupp of Sigriswil 9 Margret Aeschlimann

27 Hans Maurer of Niederhünigen 10 Katarina Leuenberger[[13]](#footnote-13)

28 Niklaus Hagi of 11 Madalena Eichenberger of Eggiwil

 Niederhünigen[[14]](#footnote-14)

29 Uli Fahrni of Schwarzenegg 12 Barbara Frutiger of Oberhofen has

been released in the area of Basel.

After enduring much persecution,

oppression and harsh imprisonment,

these female and male persons were

transported from Bern on a ship on

March 18, 1710, of which 32 persons

were thereafter released in Mannheim

in consideration of the fact that they were

old and weak people and some quite sick.

[folio 1 recto]

The other 22 who were still somewhat stronger were transported to Nijmegen, where they set them free on April 9 by means of the High and Mighty Lords of the States General and the Dutch friends and brothers, which has occurred through God’s decree.

This has been composed by Melchior Zahler of Frutigen himself and written in his own hand, in Amsterdam, May 1710.

1. 37 Melchior Zahler was born in 1670 of a well-to-do family in Frutigen, married first Benedicta Gerber of Röthenbach, and second Anna Rychen of Frutigen, was an Anabaptist deacon. Jecker, “Der Grosse Berner Täufer-Exodus,” pp. 135, 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A German version of this narrative appears in Müller, pp. 275-279; in the English translation of Müller, pp. 302-306. Another Dutch version of this letter also appears in Hendrik Toren’s Daybook (A 1009), pp. 22-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This was left blank in the original document, but in the Vorsterman copy the word “Spital” (?) is here crossed out. For a discussion of prisons used for Anabaptists in Bern, see Document 67 and Zürcher, “Die Täufer um Bern,” pp. 29, 30, 33-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In the Vorsterman copy “Pithal” (?) is here crossed out. The word “Spital” appears here in Müller, p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Lavater gives further information for each person on this list on pp. 104-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. He is thought to be the same as 9, Christian Frankhouser whose occupation was saddlemaker. Lavater, p. 108. The Dutch original spellings of names in this translation have mostly been made to harmonize with Lavater’s careful article. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This replaces the incorrect name Gerin. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Vorsterman’s reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Martisegg is the place where Wenger had been arrested (StABE, A II 623, 28ff.). He originally was from Wattenwil. Information from Hanspeter Jecker. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Müller gives Signau, and for Elsbeth Krieg he gives Hettingshem (?), p. 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jaggi or Jäggi. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Kurzenberg is a mountain range belonging to the parish of Oberdiessbach. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Lavater substitutes this for Eichllbarger, but also mentions Ellenberger and Ehlenbärger as possible, p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Niklaus Hagi is also listed as from Hünigen in Document 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)