76. October 21, 1710. Letter from Baron von Schmettau,[[1]](#footnote-1) envoy from Prussia in The Hague to Cornelis Mich[i]elsz Kalff at Zaandam about the settlement of the Swiss in Prussia, suggesting that Kalff as a representative from the Netherlands and with him a representative from Hamburg make the necessary preparatory measures for colonization in Prussia with a representative from Switzerland.

[recto]

Copy The Hague, October 21, 1710

Dear Sir:

Herewith you will find the resolution of the Canton of Bern [sent] to Envoy von Bondeli along with the copy of the official response for him of my lord and master, His Majesty, the King of Prussia, to the said resolution, which I have had translated into Dutch for your convenience. You and your brothers can examine these two documents and send me your opinion concerning them as soon as possible and also anything else regarding this matter.

And if His Royal Majesty comes to an agreement with the Canton of Bern regarding the travel and transportation expenses of the Swiss Mennonites to his lands, their brothers in these parts could also apply the collections they want to hold in their midst for their settlement. And if the Canton of Bern were to make other and further difficulties before approving the suggestion of His Majesty, for example, [asking] that the Swiss Mennonites should send their deputies to Berlin in order to consult with people there to know how every family among them could best be accommodated in their trade and work. It could be helpful to have a few of the brothers from here and Hamburg travel to Berlin with authority from the Swiss Mennonites for the purpose of coming to a definite agreement concerning their settlement and to show them the places, crop lands, and pastures where His Royal Majesty wishes to settle each family.

For if this does not take place beforehand, and these people on their arrival do not know where they are to live and how they are to support themselves, great costs and confusion will result. [This will be] more so if these people should have to stay near Berlin first and, then, have to consult and regulate where and in what way [they] the Swiss Mennonites were to

be lodged. This would make them lose all enthusiasm, at the outset, for this settlement and the love for this land through impatience. Such should be avoided.

As regards a deputy on behalf of the Mennonites in this country, there is in my judgment none better than you yourself to serve the purpose, being confident that you would bring a good result for the brothers’ settlement, and you will be pleasing and welcome to His Majesty and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Prussia, who are already acquainted with you. On this journey you could make a profit for your lumber business.[[2]](#footnote-2) From the Hamburg Mennonite friends at the same time a deputy could be [found] whom you in passing by Hamburg could take along. From Switzerland a deputy could be sent to Berlin with a list of the number of families, also of the men, the women and the children separately, as well as of their trade and work, which list could be used to direct their settlement. It would be good to settle these people as close together as possible so that they can form a separate community, where they could have a church and readily maintain themselves, if there were to be people among them (as I do not doubt) who could drain swampy ground and make pastureland of it. This being the case, His Royal Majesty could designate considerable estates to them in the Middle Marches by the Havel and the Rhine Rivers, also in Neumarkt, in Pomerania, and in Prussia [verso] where they could develop the loveliest pastures and crop lands by digging ditches and building dikes.

Since spring would be the most suitable time for this transportation and settlement, in my judgment they should wait until the coming spring. In the meantime, everything necessary for this transportation and settlement could be arranged in Berlin with the said deputies. You would be best able to take time in the winter for this assignment of planning the journey, seeing that shipping and commerce are not much in operation then. I beg you please to send a speedy response to this and to be assured that I continually remain sincerely yours,

(and was signed)

Your willing servant and good friend

Baron von Schmettau.

Letter from Baron von Schmettau

to Cornelis Michiel[s]z Kalff[[3]](#footnote-3) dated

October 21, 1710 Nr. 9

1. 76 Wolfgang von Schmettau, professional diplomat on various assignments, from the 1680s onwards for Brandenburg (Prussia), died in The Hague, February 5 or 9, 1711. Schutte, Repertorium der Buitenlandse Vertegenwoordigers, pp. 344-347. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The lumber business was characteristic for the Mennonites of the Zaan River region. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cornelis Michielsz Kalff (1652-1721) from Zaandam was a wealthy and influential businessman, active in international trade, who was befriended by Czar Peter the Great of Russia. They had first met during the Czar’s incognito stay at Zaandam in 1697; the Czar and his wife Catharine paid a visit to the Kalff family on March 5, 1717. Kalff was also a teacher (vermaner) of the Nieuwe Huys congregation on the west bank of the River Zaan, the United Flemish and Waterlander Doopsgezinden.

   The story goes (likely a nineteenth-century myth) that during his 1717 visit the Czar and his priest also attended a Mennonite church service, together with Cornelis Michielsz Kalff, who stepped forward to the pulpit and delivered the shortest sermon ever: “Think well, speak well, and do well in the name of the Lord.” The Czar then asked the priest why his sermons were so long. J. Rogge, Het geslacht Rogge te Zaandam. Drie eeuwen familiegeschiedenis tegen den achtergrond van nering en bedrijf, (Koog aan de Zaan: Uitgeverij P. Out N.V., 1948), p. 31; G.J. Honig, Uit den Gulden Bijkorf. Genealogisch-historisch-economische studiën over Zaansche Families, (Koog aan de Zaan: P. Out N.V., 1952), pp. 263 and 333; ME III, 138. Thanks to Piet Visser for this information. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)