179. July 18, 1711. Letter from Runckel at Basel: All the Mennonites have departed from Basel on the afternoon of July 16 in four ships, with the exception of Heinrich Schilt from Schangnau, who has broken his word and run away. No one of the Reistian church has reported. Runckel has had sharp words with Hans Bürki and Samuel Räber just before their departure, since they wanted to advise the others against the trip, thinking that now they were completely free. They could be compelled to travel only through the threat of Runckel that he, upon longer resistance, would ask for the intervention of Basel authorities to transport them chained to Holland.

[page 1]

Basel[[1]](#footnote-1) July 18, 1711.

Very worthy, etc.

My especially highly honored Sirs!

My last letter of the 15th of this month will have safely arrived, I hope, and you will have seen in it that the Mennonites from here departed from Bern on the 13th and arrived at Wangen. The day before yesterday around noon they all arrived here quite safely, with the exception of the previously imprisoned Heinrich Schilt from Schangnau, who contrary to his rather often pledged word slipped away, as did another unscrupulous man at Wangen. This morning, after the people who had been on five ships were arranged on four ships, in order to save expense, they were roofed over as needed and provided with the necessary supplies. They departed under the leading and protection of God. So if wind and weather are favorable, I hope that they will arrive this coming Wednesday or Thursday at Mannheim. May the Most High take them into His protection and lead and direct them to their appointed goal.

Moreover, my highly honored Sirs, I do not conceal in my great distress

[page 2] that the Emmentalers from the so-called Reistian[[2]](#footnote-2) congregation, just as from right at the beginning until now at the end, have made for me a real burning torment of heart. Also, from then up until the last moment of their departure here, they are hardened, in that the most of those of this congregation who have been imprisoned have decided and absolutely resolved not to go to Holland, but for the most part to remain either here

or at Breisach[[3]](#footnote-3) or in the Palatinate, in spite of all their promises and all our admonition. And with all [this], they yet want to have the rule over the others or to be completely separate from them.

And what most increases my grief and torment of heart is that I must see and realize that Hans Bürki[[4]](#footnote-4) and Samuel Räber, for whom with so much effort and toil I pled and whom I rescued from the French galleys, to which they were actually condemned, and whom I afterwards rescued from imprisonment in order to be able to send them with their brethren to Holland, instead of recognizing these considerable favors with an honest heart, they emerged as ringleaders and dared to try to make all the others of their congregation averse to the journey to Holland, as much as they are and may be.

These two yesterday afternoon dared to have the impudence in the company of Peter Gerber, Christen Gäuman the elder, Daniel Rothenbühler, Ulrich Schürch, Ulrich Trüssel and other persons, of those who had been imprisoned, to address me on the public street in the presence of Mr. Ritter and [page 3] other honorable persons and to ask whether I wish to take them away as prisoners or as free persons. To this I answered that they indeed could see and perceive that they were being taken away not as prisoners but as free persons, but that such freedom extends to nowhere else than to Holland, where they will be given and allowed their complete freedom.

Hans Bürki obstinately replied that I should explain whether I was taking them away as prisoners or as free people. The high sheriff in the name of the illustrious Canton of Bern had told them on the ship at Bern that they were henceforth to stay out of their land and territory. Now they were out of there and thought that as free people they could go and stay where they wished. To this I replied that this was not to be so understood, but that they must once get to Holland, and if they did not wish to go there as free people, it would not cost me much trouble with the Canton of Basel to cause them to be taken there in irons and bonds. Henceforth I did not

wish to dispute with them long, but to remind them of their promises so often given and the thankfulness owed to my highly honored Sirs.

The time is too short for me to relate all the details, and the above is given to my highly honored Sirs only to make clear the particular nature of these people, and most earnestly request that you do not attribute it to me nor to Mr. Ritter if someone of these stubborn people should run away. Mr. Ritter, Daniel Rychen, and all [page 4] the remainder of the Amish or Oberlanders behave themselves as orderly and discreetly as the others so churlishly and injudiciously. They will report in more detail personally upon their arrival.

Now for the sake of brevity I draw this to a close. And meanwhile in a mutual commitment to the gracious protection of God and your devout prayer I commend myself and continually remain,

My highly honored Sirs’

Most devoted servant,

Johann Ludwig Runckel.

Bern’s oldest bridge across the Aare River. The opening in the buildings just to the left of the bridge is the present-day preservation of the Landentor from which boats were loaded with cargo or people. From here Anabaptist prisoners were taken and sent down the river to their place of exile.

1. 179 This document is translated into Dutch in Vorsterman’s Relaes (A 1392) on pp. 209-210. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Runckel continues to use the strange spelling, Leistian, instead of Reistian, although at this time he must have had on-going contact with those involved in the division. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A Mennonite settlement at Breisach is mentioned in Document 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Huizinga, I, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)