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**Date:**  13 June 1711

**Sender:**  Runckel, Johann Ludwig

**Sender Place:**  Bern, Switzerland

**Receiver:**  Need, Committee for Foreign

**Receiver Place:**  Amsterdam, Netherlands

**Language:**  English

**Translation:**

166. June 13, 1711. Letter from Runckel to the Committee for Foreign Needs to accompany a list of departing Anabaptists, mostly from the Amish churches. He discusses extensively the passports for each territory through which the exiles must travel. Because of high water at least five sailors are needed on each ship, besides the pilots whose day wages earlier were figured too low. The five ships with 500 persons will bring the travel expenses to 3,215 rixdollars, and he asks for payment later. He complains bitterly about the Reistian churches from which no one wants to come forward, especially about the stubbornness of their elder, Peter Habegger[[1]](#footnote-16) and their ministers, Peter Spaar, Hans Gerber, Ulrich Seger, Peter Oberli, and Christian Jacob, strengthened by the influence of Daniel Grimm and Bendicht Brechtbühl, who were earlier banished, but secretly came again into the land; in order to save the others he has agreed to the capture of these two. However, their instigation has already created so much trouble that he knows no way out other than simply to leave the Reist party to their fate.

[page 1]

Bern,[[2]](#footnote-17) June 13, 1711

Very worthy, etc.

My especially highly honored Sirs,

I received your welcome communication of the 2nd of the present month properly the day before yesterday and from it have understood with satisfaction that all my letters up to the 23rd of the past month have safely arrived with you, and also what sort of reasonable and well founded complaints you make about the procedures of the local government.

Meanwhile, it no longer depends so much on further negotiations—since [they accept] none of all the grounds and reasons brought forward by my highly honored Sirs, but also none of the many more arguments presented [by me] to the local illustrious Canton at every opportunity. In fact, [they] even threaten to break off the whole matter, and for a time since then [they] have not received me publicly concerning this and still do not want to receive me.

But much [depends] from this time forward on the execution of those matters already negotiated and brought to readiness (as especially now

can be seen). So I want to turn my attention to those matters which final completion of the project necessarily requires—praise to God—to those matters which have improved a good bit since then, through my feigned indifference [page 2], derived from all the well-founded reasoning received in the very valuable letters of my highly honored Sirs. Accordingly, the departure of the poor Mennonites from this place might occur at the appointed time, [the departure] of those who want to leave, who[[3]](#footnote-18) those, as the enclosed list already shows, make up a considerable number, and among them are some moderately well-off families.

And because at present, to achieve this purpose, which chiefly concerns the required passports, already three weeks ago I gave the illustrious Canton here a petition (with the omission of all ceremonious titles) that the Canton would procure a royal passport from the French court. Then the Canton immediately wrote to the French minister here in this country that he might accomplish the task. I hope that it will arrive soon. I also want to procure one from the Imperial minister in these lands in the coming week.

Mr. Jacob Philippe d’Orville[[4]](#footnote-19) at Frankfort actually has already sent me the needed permits from Electoral Mainz and Electoral Trier with the last post, so that this matter is so good as arranged. I might only wish that [page 3] the needed passports and permits from the Imperial Court, from his princely Eminence at Württemberg as the General in charge on the Rhine, from the Elector Palatine as Imperial Vice Regent and Elector Prince, from the Landgrave of Hesse, from the Cathedral Chapter at Cologne, and his royal Majesty of Prussia as Duke of Kleve would also arrive soon or at least be kept ready. The Imperial or Austrian, the Württemberg, the Palatine,

as also the Hessian [permissions] I must necessarily wait for here in order that I may deliver them to Mr. Ritter at his departure—besides [waiting] for the Royal French, the Mainz, the Trier, and the Count Trautmansdorf[[5]](#footnote-20) [permissions].

Concerning passports and permits—that of the Archbishopric Cologne could be delivered to him at Mainz or Koblenz, the royal Prussian at Cologne, and that of your High and Mighty Sirs and our most gracious Lordship at Emmerich. In case the saving of expenses does not succeed, send them all here.

Concerning the extra high water, which will moreover increase rather than decrease because of the great deposit of snow still lying in the mountains, we will need to have on every ship at least five highly experienced shipmen, besides the pilots, as the route is taken from place to place, if we do not want to put the people and ships [page 4] in greatest danger. Although the previously mentioned Anabaptists could row quite well, otherwise they do not know in the least how to manage the control of the ships, especially in swiftly flowing waters. Moreover, the shipmen themselves would not rush headlong into danger.

These shipmen claim a much higher daily wage than was reported in my previous proposal. Accordingly, Mr. Ritter and I are working with them to negotiate in general their maintenance and daily wage to the destination and back, as well as the payment of expenses to Laufenberg and taking the pilots there and back, etc., in order to better settle the matter.[[6]](#footnote-21)

For the maintenance of the poor Anabaptists on the journey, that is to say, for their food, drink, straw, wood, etc., we calculate approximately 10

French stivers for each person, and the rough calculation for the ship people with the above costs, such at least for 20 days, so that according to a rough

estimate made for the ship people with the above costs for 5 ships comes to approximately 1550 rixdollars. The expense for 500 persons would run to approximately 1665 rixdollars. Regarding this, however, everything shall be managed very exactly, and a very precise and clear account kept by Mr. Ritter.

Besides the thousand dollars already actually drawn, the funds yet needed for this can best [page 5] be received from the Anabaptist assets accumulating here, and those assets will be restored by my highly honored Sirs themselves down there [in Holland]. For the local Anabaptist Commission has delivered to me for this purpose already several hundred dollars in an account voucher from the collected Anabaptist assets. Also, soon more sums will be delivered, but appearently, mostly, far more modest than previous moneys.

The so-called Oberlanders, or Amish, show up in a quite orderly manner, and accordingly most persons reported in the accompanying list are from the Oberlander community. Those from the Lower Country or Leistians,[[7]](#footnote-22) excluding the prisoners, remain steadfast in their obstinacy. Accordingly, disregarding my highly honored Sirs’ circular letters, the writings of admonition and reminder from the Palatinate, from Krefeld, and other locations, my private letters, my dispatches to them both from Anabaptists and from Reformed gentlemen, my reminders, my admonitions, requests, pleading, and threatening, not one single soul of them has yet reported either to anyone of the illustrious Canton’s officials, nor yet to me. Rather, they have also undertaken and, in fact, made bold to employ everything humanly possible, to persuade the prisoners and to influence them, [page 6] contrary to their pledged word, to also remain in the country and to keep themselves concealed therein in defiance of the illustrious Government, my highly honored Sirs, and me.

In this manner they have achieved their purpose so that until now no one imprisoned from this congregation wants to indicate to me even the number of his family to be taken along, much less indicate or claim the assets which were promised to be restored to them by the government, except for two or three individuals. Indeed, in this matter earlier some quite unchristian

and scolding words were allowed to be heard. Accordingly, both I and the illustrious Government are extremely disconcerted on their behalf and scarcely know how to arrange matters further that these wretched people, entrapped in so terrible an obstinacy, might be rescued out of their imminent woe, trouble, and distress, if God does not look in, does not change their stony hearts into fleshly, does not open their eyes, and bring them on the right way. This, however, as I look at it, is their own affair, and for the present is more to wish than to hope for.

Meanwhile the great God knows what kind of trouble and work for me, what kind of grief, cross, and heartsickness these wretched people heap upon my soul. The chief cause[[8]](#footnote-23) of all this recalcitrance is a certain “Trub-Peter,” or Peter Habegger,[[9]](#footnote-24) who at present is the most prominent leader of this congregation, and as a result according to his particular [page 7] thought, particular pleasure, and particular wish he leads and directs all the others, and also will plunge them with himself into the ditch that he has prepared. His helpers are a certain “Weedt Christen,” Peter Spaar [Spare],[[10]](#footnote-25) Hans Gerber in Aschpy,[[11]](#footnote-26) Ulrich Seger, Peter Oberli, and Christen Jacob, also all preachers from this congregation, and so it appears that they have all conspired to their own disaster.

The illustrious [Anabaptist] Commission even told me the day before yesterday that Daniel Grimm, who was sent away the previous year, and Bendicht Brechtbühl have again stolen into the land, and with and alongside of the above-mentioned [leaders] have advocated that no one should go out of the land.[[12]](#footnote-27) Accordingly, the officials had demanded to know whether I knew anything about them. And after I had answered with no, and we consulted together a little about this, we finally decided that in order to rescue the others, if possible, that without delay they would exert themselves to arrest these two men and bring them here. The others might then back down in response and perhaps yet show up; the two men might be deported, however, with those who are cooperative.

My highly honored Sirs may now decide themselves what will finally

result from this so terrible an obstinacy and whether such people deserve that their cause should be further espoused, also whether it would not be better to leave them to their own devices until God and their government rightly disciplines and humbles [page 8] them, and thus they be finally brought to a true understanding. This latter, if it pleases God, I wish from the depth of my heart.

By the way, Mr. Ritter is urgently asking to be informed in time as to whether he should go with the departing Anabaptists to Amsterdam or to Rotterdam so that he can make arrangements above Schenckenschans.[[13]](#footnote-28)

I recommend again the prompt dispatch of the needed passports, and remain, besides a mutual commitment to God’s strong, gracious protection, hearty greetings, and otherwise my commendations of myself and mine to your devoted prayer,

My highly honored Sirs’

Most devoted servant,

Johann Ludwig Runckel.

Bern, June 13, 1711

1. For further discussion of these Swiss Brethren leaders see Jecker, “Der Grosse Berner Täufer-Exodus von 1711,” pp. 138-143. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
2. This document is translated into Dutch in Vorsterman’s Relaes (A 1392) on pp. 196-198, and referred to in Müller, pp. 317-318 (English pp. 349-350). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
3. Vorsterman translates Runckel’s obscure German into Dutch from “and” to the end of the sentence as follows: “en die gelÿk Neevensgaande lÿste aanwÿst reeds een tamelyk getal uÿtmaken en waer onder sig ook eenige matelyk bemiddelde huÿs gesinnen bevinden.” p. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
4. Jacob Philippe d’Orville. See note in Document 150 . [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
5. The Count of Trautmansdorf is mentioned in Document 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
6. Vorsterman translates Runckel’s obscure German of this sentence into Dutch as: “waerom den Hr. Ritter en ik doende sÿn om met hen voor’t geheel te handelen, om hunn kost en dagloon heen en te rug, als mede de betaling der onkosten te Lauwffenberg, en het mede neemen en te rug brengen der lootsen etc om daer over des te beeter te regt te komen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
7. Although Runckel personally knew and met with persons from both the Amish and Reistian parties, he consistently spells Reistian with an ”L” as Leÿstisch. He also uses this spelling in Document 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
8. This problem is mentioned by Müller on pages 317-318. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
9. From the Schwarzentrub farm in the parish of Trub, Peter Habegger was suspected as an Anabaptist already in1684 and later played an important part as a Reistian in the Swiss Brethren division. Roth, pp. 21, 48, 106, and 115. For fuller information about him and the other six leaders, see Jecker, “Der Grosse Berner Täufer-Exodus von 1711,” p. 129 n. 48, pp. 139-141. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
10. North American spelling. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
11. There is an Aspi in Lauperswil near Langnau according to Hans Minder of Lauperswil, September 2, 2011. Hanspeter Jecker adds, “There are several farms with the name ‘Aspi’ in the Emmental. Later documents point towards Aspi in the parish of Langnau, south of the village.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
12. Anabaptists in Switzerland, both in Zurich and Bern, had traditionally taken the position that the government lacks authority to banish Christians, appealing to Psalm 24:1, which says, “The earth is the Lord’s.” See Lowry, Hans Landis, p. 75 n. 17, 193; Documents of Brotherly Love, I, p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
13. Schenkenschans is located west of Emmerich, just a little down the Rhine River. It is mentioned in “Emigratie over Rotterdam in de 18e eeuw,” by C. te Lintum in De Gids, IV (1908), p. 330, as an entry point into the Netherlands. Schenckenschans is a fort on the Rhine River that guarded the Dutch border. Marianne S. Wokeck, Trade in Strangers: The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), p. 63. Israel, p. 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)