

Reformation Sources

*The Letters of
Wolfgang Capito and
His Fellow Reformers in
Alsace and Switzerland*

Edited by

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CHAPTER 7

HEINRICH BULLINGER'S CORRESPONDENCE: A BRIEF INSIGHT INTO A LONG STORY

ALEXANDRA KESS

Editing the correspondence of Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) is a long-term project, not least due to the vast number of letters that have come down to us and the many challenges they pose to the editor. In this article I will provide a short survey of the history, methodology and various challenges associated with editing this correspondence. The first section will outline the general work of the Bullinger correspondence project. In the second part I will illustrate specific issues of this edition by analyzing a Latin letter to Bullinger by the London merchant Richard Hilles (1514–1587) written in Frankfurt/Main and Strasbourg on 18 and 25 September 1541. Apart from the normal editorial problems, this particular example is interesting also because Hilles added two supplements: twelve theses by Wolfgang Capito on the Decalogue, accompanied by Hilles' comments, and a list of 'proposita necessaria' and 'probabilia' by Martin Bucer concerning moral and legal questions raised by Leviticus 5. Together, these three documents present a vast array of editorial problems, such as paleographical difficulties, questions of the number and depth of annotations, comprehension difficulties, as well as the ultimate question of whether and in which form these three documents qualify for inclusion in Bullinger's correspondence as defined by the editors.

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF HEINRICH BULLINGER

The sheer volume of Bullinger's correspondence is impressive: about 12,000 letters from the years 1524 until 1575 have survived, 2,000 of which are letters by Bullinger, and 10,000 are letters addressed to Bullinger. His overall correspondence may well have exceeded 20,000 items. In purely physical terms this is a correspondence that consumed

a vast amount of paper. Bullinger noted in his diary that in the year 1569 alone he used a ream (1,000 folio sheets) of paper solely for writing letters.¹ It is primarily due to Bullinger's love for order and assembling information that we have such a large number of extant letters. He kept most of the letters addressed to him and in some cases also made a personal copy of a letter he wrote. Indeed, upon the death of a correspondent Bullinger is known to have often requested that the heirs return his letters.² Despite being one of the rather 'undiscovered' reformers, Bullinger's correspondence becomes all the more impressive when compared with that of his contemporaries: the Melanchthon corpus includes about 10,000 letters, that of Luther and Calvin about 4,200 each, while the Erasmus correspondence contains about 3,100 items.

The bulk of Bullinger's correspondence is written in Latin, representing about four-fifths of the total; about a fifth is written in early modern High German, with a few letters in French, Italian or Greek. Bullinger had a vast network of over a thousand correspondents ranging from individuals to larger groups such as ministers of a church. This network spanned the continent including what is today Great Britain, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Belarus, Russia, and, of course, Switzerland. His correspondents included prominent church leaders, kings and governors, ministers, but also ordinary people. Those with whom he exchanged most letters were theologians based close to Zurich: Johannes Haller, dean in Bern (662 letters to Bullinger and 57 from him); Ambrosius Blaurer, reformer in Constance (572 letters to Bullinger and 162 from him); Johannes Fabricius, minister in Chur (395 letters to Bullinger and 309 from him); Oswald Myconius, *antistes* of Basel (354 letters to Bullinger and 216 from him); and Theodore Beza (267 letters to Bullinger and 169 from him). Other notable correspondents include, of course, prominent reformers such as John Calvin, Philip Melanchthon and Martin Bucer, as well as rulers and statesmen such as Thomas Cranmer and Edward VI of England, Sigismund II August of Poland, Gaspard de Coligny of France, Dukes

¹Bullinger, *Heinrich Bullingers Diarium*, 97: "Plurimas et varias ad diversa et plurima loca epistolas hoc anno scripsi. Verbrucht darzu bi einem rysen papir."

²Some of the most important correspondents from whose heirs Bullinger asked for the return of his letters were, for example, Oswald Myconius, Joachim Vadian and Johannes Fabricius.

Ulrich and Christoph of Württemberg, and Landgrave Philip of Hesse. The topics addressed reflect all of the major events in politics and church policies at the time: major controversies between Wittenberg, Rome, Geneva, and Zurich; political events such as the Schmalkaldic War; the religious wars in France; the changes in the fortunes of the English Church and the rulers of England, as well as specific problems of individual churches and people. Next to these, we find many letters discussing aspects of everyday life such as general gossip, personal religious and private concerns, and the exchange of books and reading advice, sometimes accompanied by presents such as marmots, cheese and cloth.³

Bullinger's letters were collected almost from the moment they were written. Bullinger himself began this process. As mentioned above, he had a habit of collecting his own letters by preserving a copy, or even asking for the return of correspondence. Other persons in Zurich also collected his letters, such as the historian Johann Stumpf and his son Johann Rudolf Stumpf, the mayor Hans Rudolf Lavater, and the minister and ardent collector Johann Jakob Wick (1522–1588), whose collection 'Wickiana,' preserved in the Zentralbibliothek of Zurich, is a unique and invaluable treasure-trove.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Johann Jakob Breiting, then head (*antistes*) of the Zurich church, founded the Antistialarchiv, the extensive holdings of which are today held in the Staatsarchiv Zurich. This collection incorporates the acts of the synods, visitation acts, and letters by the chief Zurich ministers, most notably Bullinger and Ulrich Zwingli. Together, this collection forms about 400 volumes and is, together with the other holdings of the Staatsarchiv and the Zentralbibliothek Zurich, an exceptional collection of sources on the Reformation. Later in the century, the historian Johann Heinrich Hottinger (1620–1667) put together 51 manuscript volumes, the so-called *Thesaurus Hottingerianus*, containing original and copied writings, mainly letters, concerning Reformation history as well as Swiss and general church history.⁴

The most important collection of Bullingeriana was amassed in the eighteenth century by Johann Jakob Simler (1716–1785), whose

³A salve was made from the fat of marmots to soothe rheumatic pains.

⁴The *Thesaurus Hottingerianus* can be found in the Zentralbibliothek Zurich (Zurich ZB), Ms F 36–87.

extensive Simlersammlung forms one of the main collections of the Zentralbibliothek Zurich.⁵ Apart from these extensive collections in Zurich itself, there are also Bullinger letters to be found in other Swiss cities such as St. Gall, Basel, Bern, Geneva, and Chur. It is worth noting that several important collections of Bullinger material are also located outside Switzerland, one of the most significant being the *Thesaurus Baumianus* in Strasbourg.

The idea of producing an edition of Bullinger's letters was raised in the nineteenth century, yet was not brought to fruition. However, a good number of his letters were featured in the extensive publications of sources of the Reformation such as the correspondence between England and Zurich during the reigns from Henry VIII to Elizabeth I published by the Parker Society, something that proved immensely important for research on Bullinger, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world.⁶ The same century saw the important publication of the correspondence of Philip Melancthon and John Calvin in the *Corpus Reformatorum* as well as Herminjard's *Correspondance des Réformateurs dans les pays de langue française*.⁷ Somewhat more Swiss-centric, and hence essential for research on Bullinger, were the editions of the correspondence of the St. Gall reformer Joachim Vadian⁸ and the correspondence of Swiss reformers with Poland.⁹

At the turn of the twentieth century, an association later known as Zwingliverein was founded in Zurich under the presidency of Emil Egli (1848–1908). Egli was a particularly keen scholar of the Swiss Reformation. His principal academic goal was to finally publish the correspondence of Bullinger, but in the end he was convinced to produce first a new edition of Zwingli's works. Alongside other valuable contributions to Bullinger studies, such as the edition of Bullinger's diary, Egli transcribed about 500 Bullinger letters for future publication. In Traugott Schiess (1864–1935) he found another Bullinger enthusiast who, building on the work of Egli and others, in 1904–1906 published Bullinger's correspondence with the Swiss canton Graubünden.¹⁰ This was followed just a few years later by his edition of the correspondence

⁵The *Simlersammlung* is held in Zurich ZB, Ms S 1–266.

⁶*Epistolae Tigurinae; Original Letters; The Zurich Letters.*

⁷*Correspondance des Réformateurs.*

⁸See Vadian.

⁹*Der Briefwechsel der Schweizer mit den Polen.*

¹⁰Bullinger, *Bullingers Korrespondenz mit den Graubündnern.*

of the brothers Ambrosius and Thomas Blaurer (or Blarer), the former a reformer and the latter a mayor of the southern German city of Constance, both of whom regularly corresponded with Bullinger.¹¹

In the following years Schiess continued collecting both originals and copies of Bullinger's letters, so that by 1930 about 11,400 letters had been assembled. Over the next decades, work on Bullinger's correspondence ebbed. It was not until the founding of the Institut für Schweizerische Reformationgeschichte (Institute for Swiss Reformation History) at the University of Zurich in 1964 that the long-held wish for an edition of the Bullinger correspondence was finally put into effect.¹²

Years were spent working through the accumulated material and drawing up indices of letters, correspondents, and places, until in 1973 the first volume of the *Heinrich Bullinger Briefwechsel* was published, containing the correspondence for the years 1524 to 1531. Since then, each volume has been devoted to one year of Bullinger's correspondence. The most recent to appear is volume 12, containing the letters from 1542. With only a few exceptions the number of letters increases year by year, with the largest volumes in the foreseeable future being those covering 1546 and 1547, the years of the Schmalkaldic War.

So, how do we work? Our office in the Institut für Schweizerische Reformationgeschichte (fittingly located opposite Bullinger's former church and house) can be described as the headquarters for any research on Bullinger. We possess microfilms and microfiches of all the known Bullinger letters as well as other sixteenth-century manuscripts, both from the Zurich Staatsarchiv and Zentralbibliothek and other Swiss and European collections. We are, of course, surrounded by the works and correspondences of Calvin, Zwingli, Melancthon, Beza, and Bucer as well as virtually all the edited correspondences of other sixteenth-century figures, including such works as the political correspondence of Strasbourg in the sixteenth century.¹³ From our predecessors we inherited extensive card indices listing all of the Bullinger letters, searchable by name of correspondent, place, or date, featuring information such as

¹¹Cf. *Blaurer BW*.

¹²The history of the collection and edition of Bullinger letters has been described in the first volume of the *HHBW*: Büsser, "Die Überlieferung von Heinrich Bullingers Briefwechsel." For an English description of Bullinger's correspondence, see Henrich, "Bullinger's Correspondence."

¹³*Politische Correspondenz der Stadt Strasbourg*.

the location of originals and copies, printed or translated versions and so on. A limited amount of this information, concentrating on correspondents and places, is now available on the internet.¹⁴

The collections of handwritten or typescript copies of Bullinger letters that have accumulated over the years have partially been transcribed into a computer programme. Due to the large volume of data with which we are working, a simple Word programme would just not be able to hold and process all the information. Instead, we use a special computer programme for scholarly processing of textual data called TUSTEP (Tübinger System von Textverarbeitungs-Programmen).¹⁵ This programme was created about 25 years ago at the University of Tübingen and has since been used by many academic editions of works, correspondences, and linguistic corpora. It works with an extensive number of special commands and tags, enabling the use of many different scripts and settings while taking up only a small space on the work surface. A special programme has been devised for our project that enables us to print out a completed letter in a form very close to the final printed version.

In our edition we provide a transcription of the original of a letter if possible; if the original has not survived, we use the oldest surviving copy. If a draft exists, we take it into consideration as well. Any corrections or annotations by the author are mentioned in textual comments. In the annotations we attempt to elucidate all references to other letters or writings, dates, events, and people; in the published volumes of the Bullinger edition, there are over 1,100 short biographies of persons mentioned in the letters. It is very useful to us that the Staatsarchiv, Stadtarchiv, and Zentralbibliothek are only a short walk away so that we can, for example, compare our copy of a letter with the original (especially helpful when our copy is not very legible) or examine the original for the remains of a seal or the foldings of the letter.

Any project, especially one of such scale, needs astute planning and clear guidelines. The first volume of the Bullinger correspondence strove to create a comprehensive list of editorial conventions. These include practical regulations such as the spelling of Latin and German texts, punctuation, capitalization, gaps in the text, etc. A definition of what constitutes a letter to be included in this edition is also attempted:

¹⁴<<http://www.unizh.ch/irg/briefwechseldb/index.html>> or <http://www.unizh.ch/irg/briefwechseldb/index_engl.html> for an English version.

¹⁵For details and publications see <http://www.zdv.uni-tuebingen.de/tustep/tustep_eng.html> (accessed 25/10/2005).

any document addressed to Bullinger or addressed by him to another party (alone or with other people), among which are counted Bullinger's dedications of his books to contemporaries. The fact that we do include letters written by or addressed to Bullinger and a group of people, usually ministers or a council, increases the number of letters dramatically, but these collective letters are truly indispensable. For practical reasons of space, time, and money, it was later agreed that from volume 7 (correspondence from 1537) onwards the letters already fully published in other editions would not be reedited but simply summarized.

When it comes to defining what a letter is or what belongs to a letter, we are faced by two problematic cases: "Zeitungen" and supplements. The volumes of sixteenth-century manuscripts in the Zurich archives are full of news reports called "Zeitungen" (meaning 'newspapers' in modern German; 'news' in Bullinger's time). These pose a special challenge to us since they lack the features of a normal letter: they usually bear no address, place, or date and are not addressed to one person but put together for circulation to a wider circle. Often, it is not even clear whether the author and the writer or copyist of such a news report are one and the same person. For these practical reasons such "Zeitungen" are not included in the edition. Our early predecessors, Simler and Schiess, were aware of this problem and omitted news reports when copying out Bullinger's letters. Bullinger himself used this form of information transmission especially during the Schmalkaldic War, when he composed bulletins containing information from letters addressed to him as well as from oral reports; often he would also indicate the source of the information, citing the place and date, and in some cases even the informant.¹⁶

Another problem is created when additional material has been added to a letter in the form of a supplement. Quite a large number of letters include attachments or enclosures, yet we find ourselves faced with many challenges in dealing with such material: for instance, it is often not clear to which letter an attachment belongs. Typically, we include supplements in our edition, especially since in contrast to the impersonal news reports these supplements are very often referred to in the accompanying letter itself or even signed and dated. However, in the case of long supplements we sometimes have to decide against

¹⁶For examples of news reports sent by Bullinger to Philip of Hesse, see Neudecker, *Urkunden aus der Reformationszeit*, Nos. 202, 204, 205.

publication, not least for reasons of time and space. The size of these supplements can vary greatly from only one or two pages, as in the case of the letter by Hilles discussed below, to extensive tracts that could have stood alone as small book publications in their own right.

The Hilles letter serves as an illustration of the typical format and practices of the Bullinger edition. The letter is assigned a number. The usual details—name of correspondents, place, and date—follow. We then provide information regarding the location of the original copy and whether it is printed elsewhere, either in full, abridged, or condensed form. This information is followed by a summary of the text in German. A paragraph break in the text is denoted by the use of full stops in the summary; different ideas within a paragraph are separated by semi-colons. The summary is then followed by a transcription of the original text. This is accompanied by textual criticisms and annotations that in the final edition appear in two separate columns.

A LETTER BY RICHARD HILLES TO HEINRICH BULLINGER,
FRANKFURT/MAIN AND STRASBOURG, 18/25 SEPTEMBER 1541

I wish to illustrate the special challenges faced by the Heinrich Bullinger edition with the example of the above-mentioned letter by Richard Hilles (1514–1587). Hilles was an educated and well-connected English cloth merchant, the founder of the Merchant Taylors' School in London. He was in close contact with many leading theologians and scholars, especially during the Henrician rule. Due to his reformed convictions he spent the years 1541 to 1548 in Strasbourg, whence he visited Bullinger in Zurich; after his return to England he retained his trade and private connections with the continent.¹⁷ The first extant letter of the correspondence between Bullinger and Hilles is dated August 1541. All in all, we possess 31 letters from Hilles to Bullinger dating from 1541 to 1572 as well as one letter from Bullinger from 1542. In addition, we also possess a single letter by Hilles' wife, Anna, to Bullinger, dated 1543.

From the extant letters we can deduce that many more letters were exchanged between the two men and also between Anna Hilles and Bullinger, and between Anna Hilles and Bullinger's wife. Hilles also exchanged letters with other important people in Zurich, such as Rudolf Gwalther, Zwingli's son-in-law and Bullinger's successor. The topics addressed in Hilles' correspondence cover a considerable range of topics,

¹⁷On Hilles, see Lätt, *The first Anglo-Swiss Trader*.

from discussions of theological questions, reading recommendations, and news reports from England to more mundane matters relating to business transactions and wives' requests to send butter, cheese, or an especially nice cloth. The vast majority of the letters between Hilles and Bullinger, along with other correspondence between Zurich and England, were published by the Parker Society in the mid-nineteenth century in *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation* and *Epistolae Tigurinae* covering the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Mary Tudor and in *The Zurich Letters*, for the reign of Elizabeth I.

The letter in question is a curiosity in several respects. It is a rather long and extensive letter from Hilles to Bullinger, an answer to Bullinger's no longer extant letter from 31 August. The majority of this letter was written on 18 September in Frankfurt during the autumn fair, with a postscript added upon Hilles' return to Strasbourg, dated 25 September. It deals largely with business transactions and in the latter part describes the current situation in England. The letter is preserved in the state archive of Zurich.¹⁸ A Latin transcription of this letter is published in the *Epistolae Tigurinae*, and an English translation is given in the *Original Letters*; furthermore, a short summary is to be found in the *Letters and papers, foreign and domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII*.¹⁹

As mentioned above, our edition neither reproduces nor comments upon letters that have been previously published. Instead, we simply offer a summary of them. This does not actually mean that we save a lot of time, since we still have to transform sometimes rather cryptic texts into texts that are understandable to those not fully aware of the events in Europe in a certain month in a certain year. References to times like 'several years ago' have to be assigned an exact year; references to people such as 'my brother,' 'the king's wife,' or 'Christopher' have to be identified—these are set in square brackets. Unfortunately, just providing a summary means that, apart from significant cases, we can neither offer explanations or comments on the text itself nor rectify incomplete transcriptions (e.g. omissions of marginal comments) or any mistakes in the transcription or translation of texts. In one case, though, I felt compelled to ignore our guidelines and add a footnote to correct the *Epistolae Tigurinae*: Hilles asks Bullinger to send letters by a servant to

¹⁸Staatsarchiv Zürich E II 369, 73b^r–73c^v. The summary of the letter by Hilles and the edition of the supplements are published in *HHBW*, vol. 11, No. 1569.

¹⁹*Epistolae Tigurinae*, No. 106, pp. 143–147; *Original Letters*, vol. 1, No. 106, pp. 216–221; *Letters and papers*, vol. 16, No. 1204, pp. 559–560.

‘Clariam,’ translated into English as ‘to Clare,’ whereas ‘Clariam’ actually stands for the Swiss canton Glarus.

Another consequence of this practice for our letter is that a marginal comment by Hilles describing where exactly in Strasbourg he lived, ignored in the English editions, will not be transcribed.²⁰ Likewise, there are two cases where Hilles drew a special mark on the margin, in one case copying the label on an English cheese sent to Bullinger via the Zurich printer Christoph Froschauer (fol. 73b^v; fig. 7.1); in another, the mark on the leaden seal of the cloth sent to Zurich (fol. 73c^r; fig. 7.2).²¹ In the *Epistolae Tigurinae* and the *Original Letters* these marks are represented by an ‘x’ and ‘+’ in the text. In the case of this particular letter we provide a summary only. In the face of the large number of letters we have to edit and the time constraints under which we are working, there is no framework for offering a depiction or reproduction of these marks. Even if we were to edit the letter fully, there is no precedent for including illustrations in our edition.

To complicate things further, the letter actually comes with two supplements unacknowledged by the various editions that have included this letter. One of these supplements is a treatise by Wolfgang Capito on the Decalogue,²² which has been copied by an unidentified hand, and the other is by Bucer, in his own hand, on Leviticus 5.²³ It is clear that these supplements belong to the letter since Hilles refers to them, writing: “Together with this letter you will receive the opinion of our friend Capito on original sin.”²⁴ Capito’s tract is on the Decalogue, but Bucer’s tract deals with sin and the remission of sin. This indicates that Hilles must have confused, or rather conflated the two in the sentence and hence shows us that both enclosures belong to this particular letter. Extra weight is lent to this hypothesis by a comment written by Hilles himself on the Capito enclosure: “Here you also have some other propositions by Martin Bucer.”²⁵

²⁰The marginal remark on fol. 73b^v reads: “Ich bin ein inwoner, aber ghen burgher nit. Ich wohne vor dem Minster zum alten gullerhoff” (I am a resident, but not a citizen. I live opposite the cathedral in the old Gullerhoff). See Illustration 7.1.

²¹See Illustration 7.2.

²²Staatsarchiv Zurich E II 369, 73a^{r-v}.

²³Staatsarchiv Zurich E II 369, 72b^r–72c^v.

²⁴Fol. 73c^r: “Recipies cum his scriptis sententiam Capitonis nostri de peccato originis.”

²⁵Fol. 73a^v: “Habes hic preterea alia d. Martini Bu[ceri] proposita...”

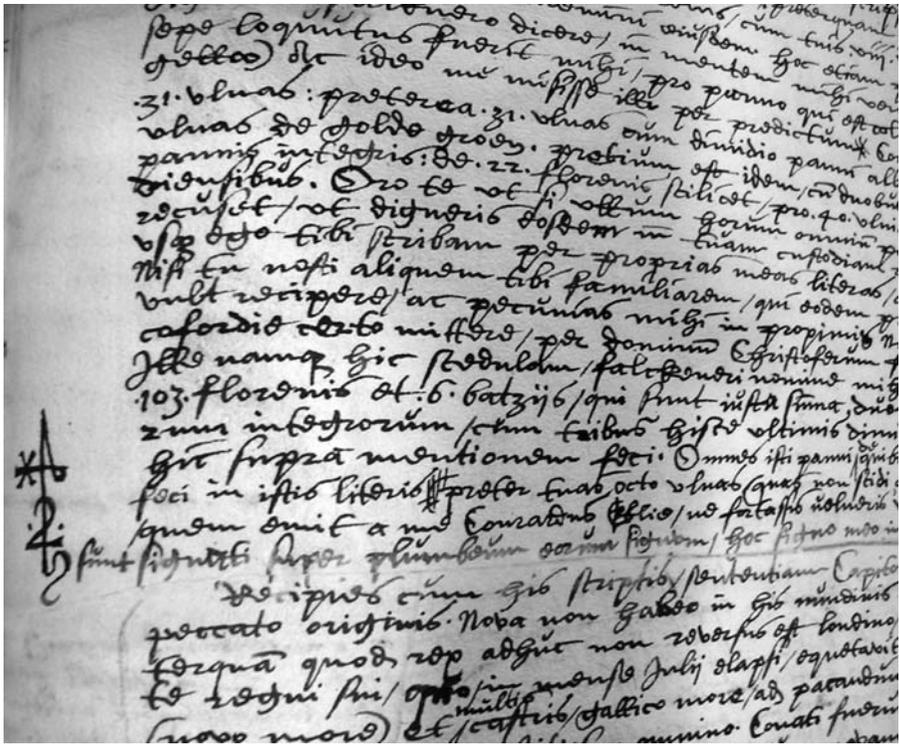


Fig. 7.2. Hilles' leaden seal on cloth sent to Zurich (margin of Hilles' letter to Bullinger, 18/25 September 1541, Zurich SA, E II 369, fol. 73c^r).

According to the guidelines of our edition, we include supplements that clearly belong to a letter. Since this is the case here and the two supplements have not been published so far, in this specific case we provide a summary of the Hilles letter and a full transcription of the supplements, complete with textual criticisms and annotations. Just like the letter, both supplements come with their own difficulties.

Let us now look at the first supplement, that of Capito. The text itself has not been published yet, but a French summary can be found in Olivier Millet's *Correspondance de Wolfgang Capiton*.²⁶ Millet was aware of the connection to the Hilles letter, but did not specify this

²⁶Millet, No. 762, pp. 272–273. The manuscript source is followed by a reference to the Hilles letter in the *Epistolae Tigurinae*.

information. The “propositions on the law ... by Capito in July,” as Hilles adds, are not in Capito’s hand and so far we have not been able to identify the writer. On the recto side, we find twelve propositions by Capito with annotations by Hilles. In our edition these annotations do not feature in the text itself, but in the textual apparatus. The first annotation is a rather complicated one, since Hilles corrects one word and adds another above the line. If this were the main text, we would add a textcritical footnote to explain this, here we have to add it in brackets to the text of the footnote. Hilles also refers to a passage from Augustine’s *De spiritu et littera*; in case of such references we always try to find the exact passage and give this information in a footnote; here again, we have to add it in square brackets to the footnote providing Hilles’ marginal comment. Since we generally do not include marginal comments in our summary of a letter, Hilles’ comments will have to be relegated to the footnotes.

On the verso side, Hilles himself explains that some of these propositions arose out of a controversy regarding the cult of images and further expands on Capito’s teaching; this text we transcribed fully. In a postscript Hilles announces the inclusion of a text by Martin Bucer, remarking that he himself usually does not attend the disputations. Bucer’s thoughts on Leviticus 5, covering four pages (two sheets), follow. The text is clearly in Bucer’s hand and does not seem to have been published before. It is divided into two parts: the first part is headed ‘proposita necessaria’ and features eight points; the second part also discusses eight points and is headed ‘probabilia.’

The Bucer supplement presented a real challenge, due both to Bucer’s distinctive handwriting and to the theological peculiarities of the text. The text as it now stands seems to make sense to us, although there are still a few lingering questions. If we compare the notes by Bucer with those of Capito, one immediately notices the differences between a copied text, written down without mistakes, and a text scribbled down quickly, featuring many corrections of single words or whole sentences, which in turn means many textcritical footnotes.

Both texts will be valuable for theologians, and it would be interesting to find out in which contexts they were written. However, this would require a further period of extensive research that a rather large-scale project dealing with such an enormous amount of letters waiting for edition simply cannot afford.

This article has shed some light on the history and on the nature of the work involved in the edition of the Bullinger correspondence,

its specific characteristics, and its challenges. Because of its own limitations, the article could touch upon only some of the difficulties facing the editors. The Hilles letter, with its two supplements, illustrates virtually all possible dilemmas a single letter could pose. What on paper may seem to be a task easily and quickly solved is, in fact, a labour that requires many long weeks of detective work, and this is typical of the challenges Bullinger and his correspondents have bequeathed to us.

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