

CLASSICS
OF THE
RADICAL
REFORMATION

The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism



the sources of
Swiss Anabaptism

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Classics of the Radical Reformation

Classics of the Radical Reformation is an English-language series of Anabaptist and Free Church documents translated and annotated under the direction of the Institute of Mennonite Studies, which is the research agency of the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, and published by Plough Publishing House.

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the sources of Swiss Anabaptism

the Grebel Letters
and
related Documents

Edited by
Leland Harder



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*To the memory of the three predecessors
in this Grebel "life and letters" project*

**HAROLD S. BENDER
EDWARD YODER
ERNST CORRELL**

*and to Elizabeth Horsch Bender
who in the eighth decade of her life
translated most of the German-documents in this collection.*

Preface to the New Edition

It took fifty years for Conrad Grebel's letters and the accompanying resources on the early history of the Zurich Anabaptists to be translated and published in English. In his editor's preface to the 1985 edition, Leland Harder offers a detailed description of the complex historical background.

Research into Swiss Anabaptism has changed markedly since the publication of this volume. Nowadays, a distinction is made between so-called normative research into the Anabaptists and revisionist examination. Starting with Ernst Troeltsch's groundbreaking studies,¹ the "Bender School"² in particular generated substantial and fundamental works that accepted the pacifist and potentially separatist Swiss Anabaptism as the norm, according to which all other manifestations of the Anabaptist movement were to be measured. In spite of many new findings from exhaustive research into and investigation of original sources, this normative perspective approach conveyed an *idealized* image of early Anabaptism, which also served as an identification model for current Free Church concepts.

A new approach in the research of Anabaptism, based on large-scale empirical research using social and economic historical methods, was triggered by the resurgence of socio-historical interpretations in the 1970s. This development led to a move from a monogenetic, normative view to a polygenetic, pluralistic image of the Anabaptist movement.³ In addition, new perspectives have led to research projects with a cultural and theological-historical orientation being established since the turn of the century.⁴

There is general consensus among researchers that the Swiss Anabaptists drew on and recruited from the circle of Huldrych Zwingli's supporters in the early days of the Reformation movement in Zürich. Recent research has put a new perspective on Conrad Grebel's significance as a leader of the Anabaptist movement, shifting the focus to collective and social contexts and the roles of a wide range of players.⁵

Nevertheless, this book, which is intended for a wider readership, offers great possibilities. Conrad Grebel's correspondence with his brother-in-law Vadian, a reformer from St. Gallen, maps the structure of the published source material. Harder presents the correspondence in the form of a five-act drama, including a prologue and an epilogue, which portrays the development of Conrad Grebel from a humanistically educated, middle-class citizen into a leader of the Anabaptist movement. The focus rests on developing and opening up the protagonist's biographical turning points and spiritual changes. This enables insight from the perspective of a key player into the Zürich Reformation – which from very early on was becoming increasingly pluralized – and into the emerging Anabaptist movement. This is a strength of the edition, as the correspondence can thus be effectively penetrated and categorized.

At the same time, this concentration on the persona of Grebel also represents a weakness. In essence, it causes the significance of the organizational structures of the emerging Anabaptist movement, such as the humanistic sodalities and the reformist reading circles, to recede into the background. Effectively, as a result of the source presentation, Grebel tends to be styled as the founder of the new Anabaptist Church according to the paradigm of normative research into Anabaptism, without pointing out his close interconnection with the community of reform-minded citizens. For readers, it is relevant here to incorporate the findings of recent research into Anabaptism critically and with a degree of skepticism,⁶ bringing a knowledgeable awareness to the source material. Additional illustrations and commentaries on individual documents enable good insight into the early history of the Anabaptist movement within the framework of the Zürich Reformation.

Harder had the ability to make use of existing translations and, at the same time, to supplement these by working together with further experts. It is this coordination and its independent and skillful translation work that really determine the great value of this collection. I continue to find it remarkable that Harder not only respected and valued the evolving knowledge from preceding research into Anabaptism in this publication but that he was also able to set new priorities through his insightful commentary.

It is particularly welcome that the volume is to be republished in the run-up to the five-hundred-year anniversary of the emergence of Reformation Anabaptism, which is to be celebrated around the world in 2025.

Andrea Strübind

Notes

1. See, e.g., Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009; *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* [1912]); Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2017; *Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt* [1906]).

2. Harold S. Bender, *Conrad Grebel, c. 1498–1526: The Founder of the Swiss Brethren, Sometimes Called Anabaptists*, 2nd ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1971); John C. Wenger, *Even unto Death: The Heroic Witness of the Sixteenth-Century Anabaptists* (Richmond, VA: Knox, 1961); Franklin H. Littell, *Das Selbstverständnis der Täufer* (Kassel: Oncken, 1966); Robert Friedmann, *Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1973); George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2000 [1962]); John H. Yoder, *Täuferium und Reformation in der Schweiz: Die Gespräche zwischen Täufern und Reformatoren 1523–1538* (Karlsruhe: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1962); John Howard Yoder, *Täuferium und Reformation im Gespräch: Dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung der frühen Gespräche zwischen schweizerischen Täufern und Reformatoren* (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1968). On the history of normative Anabaptist research, see Levi Miller, “A Reconstruction of Evangelical Anabaptism,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69 (1995): 295–306; James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence, KS: Coronado, 1979).

3. See James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Deppermann, “From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49 (1975): 83–121.

4. See, e.g., Andrea Strübind, *Eifriger als Zwingli: Die frühe Täuferbewegung in der Schweiz* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2003).

5. See C. Arnold Snyder, “The Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism (1520–1530),” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 80 (2006): 501–645; Andrea Strübind, “Radical Reformation (Anabaptism),” in *A Companion to the Swiss Reformation*, edited by Amy Burnett and Emidio Campi (Boston: Brill, 2016), 389–443 (393–95).

6. See James A. Stayer, “Täuferforschung,” *MennLex V*, <http://www.mennlex.de/doku.php?id=top:taeuferforschung>.

Contents

<i>General Editor's Preface</i>	15
<i>Editor's Preface</i>	17
<i>Introduction</i>	25
<i>Photo Section</i>	33
<i>Cast of Characters</i>	47

Prologue, 1517

Pro. A. Vadian's Vision for Grebel's Education, Vienna, 2/28/1517	49
--	----

Act 1, 1517-1518: THE STUDENT

1. <i>Grebel to Zwingli, Vienna, 9/8/1517</i>	55
1A. Vadian to Grebel, Vienna, 5/1/1518	58
1B. Grebel Addresses Mela, Vienna, 5/1518	59
2. <i>Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 7/23/1518</i>	60
2A. Myconius to Vadian, Zurich, 7/23/1518	62
3. <i>Grebel to Zwingli, Zurich, 7/31/1518</i>	63
3A. The Ascent of Mt. Pilatus, 8/1518	64
3B. Myconius to Vadian, Zurich, 9/15/1518	67
4. <i>Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 9/26/1518</i>	67
4A. Myconius to Vadian, Zurich, 10/15/1518	69
4B. Zurgilgen to Vadian, Paris, 10/26/1518	69
5. <i>Grebel to Vadian, Paris, 10/26/1518</i>	70
5A. Myconius to Vadian, Zurich, 11/12/1518	74
5B. Grebel's Poem "To Joachim Vadian," Paris, 1518	75

Act 2, 1518-1520: THE PRODIGAL

6. <i>Grebel to Vadian, Paris, 1/29/1519</i>	76
--	----

7. Grebel to Myconius, Paris, 1/30/1519	82
7A. Glarean to Myconius, Paris, 6/7/1519	83
8. Grebel to Myconius, Paris, 6/9/1519	84
9. Grebel to Myconius, Paris, 7/18/1519	86
9A. Jacob Grebel to Vadian and Hans Wirz, Zurich, 8/26/1519	88
10. Grebel to Vadian, Melun, 10/6/1519	89
11. Grebel to Vadian, Paris, 1/1/1520	92
12. Grebel to Myconius, Paris, 1/14/1520	93
13. Grebel to Vadian, Paris, 1/14/1520	96
14. Grebel to Myconius, Paris, 3/7/1520	100
15. Grebel to Myconius, Paris, 4/13/1520	102
16. Grebel to Vadian, Paris, 4/13/1520	103
16A. Tschudi to Vadian, Paris, 6/20/1520	104

Act 3, 1520-1522: THE SEEKER

17. Grebel to Myconius, Zurich, 7/6/1520	106
18. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 7/13/1520	108
19. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 7/17/1520	110
19A. Zwingli to Myconius, Zurich, 7/24/1520	112
20. Grebel to Myconius, Zurich, 7/25/1520	115
21. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 7/29/1520	117
22. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 8/3/1520	118
23. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 9/11/1520	119
23A. Jacob Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 10/17/1520	121
23B. Myconius to Vadian, Zurich, before 10/17/1520	123
24. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 11/7/1520	123
25. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, between 11/19/1520 and 12/8/1520	125
25A. Zwingli to Myconius, Einsiedeln, 11/19/1520	128
26. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 12/8/1520	128
26A. Grebel's Address "To the True Fair Reader," Zurich, 12/24/1520	131
27. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 1/4/1521	133
28. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 2/1/1521	135
29. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 2/19/1521	137
30. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 3/19/1521	139
31. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 4/8/1521	140
32. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 4/25/1521	141
32A. Burgauer to Vadian, St. Gallen, 4/28/1521	142
33. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 5/28/1521	143

34. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, between 5/28/1521 and 7/14/1521	144
35. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 7/14/1521	146
36. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 7/22/1521	147
37. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 8/4/1521	149
38. Grebel to Vadian, Basel, 8/21/1521	150
39. Grebel to Vadian, Basel, 9/2/1521	151
39A. Cratander to Capito, Basel, 9/20/1521	153
39B. Ursinus to Vadian, Basel, 10/1/1521	153
40. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, end of 10/1521	154
41. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 11/2/1521	155
42. Grebel to Myconius, Zurich, 11/4/1521	156
43. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 12/18/1521	158
44. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 12/29/1521	159
45. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 1/12/1522	160
46. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 1/30/1522	162
46A. Falconibus to Vadian, Zurich, 2/1/1522	163

Act 4, 1522-1523: THE ADVOCATE

47. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 2/6/1522	164
47A. Investigation of Plans for a <i>Badenschenke</i> , Zurich, 5/1522	166
47B. The Wyss Chronicle of Preaching Disturbances, Zurich, 7/1522	172
47C. Uproar in the Council Chambers, Zurich, 7/7/1522	177
47D. The Zwingli-Grebel Reply to the Bishop's Admonition, Zurich, 8/22-23/1522	178
47E. Zwingli to Myconius, Zurich, 8/26/1522	186
47F. Erasmus to Zwingli, Basel, 9/8/1522	187
47G. Macrinus to Zwingli, Solothurn, 10/15/1522	188
48. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 11/21/1522	189
49. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 12/1/1522	191
49A. Zwingli to Vadian, Zurich, 12/8/1522	192
50. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 12/25/1522	193
51. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 12/29/1522	194
51A. The First Zurich Disputation, 1/29/1523	196
51B. Castelberger's Home Bible Study Fellowship, Zurich, 1523	203
52. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 6/17/1523	207
52A. Council Decree on the Tithe, Zurich, 6/22/1523	208

52B. Zwingli's Sermon on Divine and Human Justice, 6/24/1523	210
53. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 7/15/1523	220
54. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 7/16/1523	221
54A. Burgauer to Grebel, St. Gallen, 7/21/1523	222
55. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 7/28/1523	224
56. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 8/11/1523	225
57. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 9/6/1523	226
57A. Zwingli's Defense of His Booklet on the Mass Canon, 10/9/1523	226
57B. Jacob Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 10/12/1523	232
57C. The Second Zurich Disputation, 10/26-28/1523	234
57D. The Council's Mandate After the Disputation, Zurich, end of October, 1523	251
57E. The Report of Veit Suter, 10/31/1523	252
57F. Zwingli to Vadian, Zurich, 11/11/1523	254
58. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 11/12/1523	256
58A. Zwingli's "Introduction" to the Disputation Findings, Zurich, 11/17/1523	257
58B. The Turning Point in the Zwinglian Reformation, Zurich, 12/10-19/1523	267

Act 5, 1523-1526: THE RINGLEADER

59. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 12/18/1523	275
59A. The Grebel-Stumpf Alternative Plan of a Separatist Church, Zurich, before 12/23/1523	276
60. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 2/26/1524	279
61. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 7/31/1524	281
62. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 9/3/1524	282
63. Grebel to Müntzer, Zurich, 9/5/1524	284
64. Grebel to Müntzer, Zurich, 9/6/1524	292
65. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 10/14/1524	294
65A. Anabaptist Beginnings in St. Gallen, 1524	297
66. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 11/23/1524	298
66A. The Tuesday Disputations, Zurich, 12/6 and 12/13/1524	300
67. Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 12/15/1524	301
67A. Zwingli to Lambert <i>et al.</i> , Zurich, 12/16/1524	303
67B. The Mantz Petition of Defense, Zurich, 12/1524	311
67C. Zwingli's Treatise on Rebels and Rebellion, between 12/7/1524 and 12/28/1524	315

67D.	Vadian to Grebel, St. Gallen, 12/28/1524	321
67E.	Hegenwald to Grebel, Wittenberg, 1/1/1525	322
68.	<i>Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 1/14/1525</i>	331
68A.	Notice of a Public Disputation on Baptism, Zurich, 1/15/1525	333
68B.	The First Public Disputation on Baptism, Zurich, 1/17/1525	333
68C.	Council Mandate for Infant Baptism, Zurich, 1/18/1525	336
68D.	Zwingli to Vadian, Zurich, 1/19/1525	336
68E.	Council Decree Against Anabaptists, Zurich, 1/21/1525	337
68F.	The First Believers' Baptism in Switzerland, Zurich, 1/21/1525	338
68G.	Reports of Illegal Anabaptist Activity, Zurich, 1/30/1525	343
68H.	The Oldest Anabaptist Congregation: Zollikon	343
68I.	Prison Disputation with the Zollikon Anabaptists, Zurich, 1/30-2/8/1525	345
68J.	Brötli to the Brethren in Zollikon, Hallau, 2/1525	349
68K.	Sentences Against Anabaptists, Zurich, 2/18/1525	352
68L.	The Second Public Disputation on Baptism, Zurich, 3/20/1525	352
68M.	Zwingli to Vadian, Zurich, 3/31/1525	356
69.	<i>Grebel to Castelberger, Zurich, 4/25/1525</i>	357
69A.	The Spread of Anabaptism to St. Gallen, 2/1525-5/1525	359
69B.	Charges Against an Unnamed Person, St. Gallen, 5/15/1525	362
69C.	Zwingli's Treatise on Baptism, Rebaptism, and Infant Baptism, 5/27/1525	362
69D.	Zwingli to Vadian, Zurich, 5/28/1525	374
69E.	The First Two Swiss Anabaptist Martyrs: Bolt Eberli and an Unnamed Priest, Lachen, 5/29/1525	376
70.	<i>Grebel to Vadian, Zurich, 5/30/1525</i>	378
70A.	The Reactions to Anabaptism in St. Gallen, 5-6/1525	380
70B.	Court Proceedings in St. Gallen, 6/5-6/1525	384
70C.	Zwingli's Tract "Concerning the Office of Preaching," 6/3/1525	385
70D.	Procession of Zollikon Prophets to Zurich, after 6/12/1525	410
70E.	Grebel and Hottinger in Waldshut, 6/1525	411

70F. Grebel's Mission to the District of Grüningen, 7/1525	412
71. <i>Grebel and Bosshart to the Zurich Council, Zollikon, 7/6/1525</i>	416
71A. Imprisonment of Four Anabaptists, Zurich, 7/11/1525	417
71B. The Visit of Finsterbach and Friends, Zurich, 7/1525	418
71C. The Bailiff's Report of Anabaptists in Grüningen, 7/12/1525	418
71D. Investigation of Grebel's Activities, Zurich, 7/12/1525	421
71E. The Third Swiss Anabaptist Martyr: Hans Krüsi, Luzern, 7/27/1525	422
71F. The Grebel/Krüsi Collection of Bible Passages, Augsburg, after 7/27/1525	425
71G. Jud to Vadian, Zurich, 8/8/1525	428
71H. The Arrest of Grebel and Blaurock, Grüningen, 10/8/1525	429
71I. Zwingli to Vadian, Zurich, 10/11/1525	431
71J. The Third Public Disputation on Baptism, Zurich, 11/6-8/1525	432
71K. The Trial of Grebel, Mantz, and Blaurock, Zurich, 11/9-18/1525	436
71L. Mandate of the Zurich Council to the Grüningen Magistrates, Zurich, 11/30/1525	443
71M. The Tenth Disputation with the Anabaptists: Retrial and Sentencing, Zurich, 3/5-7/1526	443
71N. Zwingli to Vadian, Zurich, 3/7/1526	449
71O. The Prison Escape of the Anabaptists, Zurich, 3/21/1526	450
71P. Zwingli to Wüst, Zurich, 4/10/1526	452
71Q. The Flight of Grebel, Glattfelden, 4/11/1526	454
71R. The Death of Grebel, Maienfeld, 8/1526	455
 Epilogue, 1526-1540	
Epi.A. The Trial and Execution of Jacob Grebel, Zurich, 10/11-30/1526	457
Epi.B. The Banishment of Blaurock and Execution of Mantz, Fourth Martyr of the Swiss Anabaptists, Zurich, 1/5/1527	473

Epi.C. Zwingli's Dialogue with Grebel's Ghost, Zurich, 7/31/1527	475
Epi.D. Joint Decree for the Suppression of the Anabaptists, Zurich, 9/9/1527	506
Epi.E. The Fifth and Sixth Swiss Anabaptist Martyrs: Jacob Falk and Heine Reimann, Zurich, 9/5/1528	512
Epi.F. The Preachers' Disputation with the Anabaptists, Bern, 3/11-17/1538	519
Epi.G. Vadian's Critique of Grebel and Other Anabaptist Leaders, St. Gallen, 8/19/1540	523
<i>Character Profiles</i>	527
<i>Notes</i>	576
<i>Literature Cited</i>	775
<i>Index of Biblical References</i>	783
<i>General Index</i>	789
<i>The Editor</i>	815
<i>Maps</i>	Inside Back Cover

General Editor's Preface

For many years a committee of German and North American historians known as the *Täuferaktenkommission* (TAK) has published source materials of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement under the title *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer* (QGT). More recently a similar organization has begun work in the Netherlands with Dutch source materials. It is known as the *Commissie tot de uitgave van Documenta Anabaptistica Neerlandica* (CUDAN). These developments have, obviously, been deeply rewarding to scholars and others as the multitude of articles and books using these documents amply verifies.

There are, however, still relatively few sixteenth-century Anabaptist materials available in the English language, though their number is increasing. It is to meet this need that the *Classics of the Radical Reformation* (CRR) series was begun some years ago with the aim of making available in the English language a scholarly and critical edition of the primary works of major Anabaptist and free church writers of the late fifteenth, sixteenth, and early seventeenth centuries. The first volume in this series, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* by John H. Yoder, appeared in 1973. *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* by William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, appeared in 1978, and *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* by Walter Klaassen, in 1981. Other volumes are in process.

In preparing these translations it has not been considered essential to the purposes of the series to include every known document of the writers under translation and, unless some contribution can be made to a fuller understanding of the text, it has not been considered essential to pursue at length critical textual issues. Those scholars interested in the details will, in any case, turn to the original language text. Where a choice had to be made between clarity and awkward literalism, the translators were encouraged to favor readability but without compromising the text.

Most of the volumes in the CRR include the writings of one author only. The central focus in the present volume is the correspondence of Conrad Grebel, but the scope has been enlarged to include also the documents most relevant to the unfolding of the Swiss Brethren story written by others, as the editor explains in his preface. The original intention of the editors was to include this volume in the *Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History* (SAMH) series of the Mennonite Historical Society, as well as in the CRR series, in view of the fifty-year interest of the Mennonite Historical Society in the project, but marketing and other considerations led to its inclusion in CRR only. The long history of the development of the project is explained fully in the editor's preface.

It is a pleasure to express appreciation to editor Leland Harder for his "labor of love" of many years, as well as to Leonard Gross, J. C. Wenger, and John H. Yoder, who served the editor and the Institute of Mennonite Studies as consultants, and to the Editorial Council of CRR as listed across from the title page. The North American Committee for the Documentation of Free Church Origins (NACDFCO), of which Professor George H. Williams, Harvard Divinity School, serves as chairman and Walter Klaassen as secretary, was helpful with its encouragement and counsel during the initial stages of the launching of the CRR series. Finally, without the commitment to the work of the church on the part of Mennonite Publishing House (Herald Press) and its willingness to include the series in its responsibility to society and the church, this venture could not have been undertaken.

Cornelius J. Dyck, Editor, CRR
Institute of Mennonite Studies
Elkhart, Indiana

Editor's Preface

Plans for the publication of this book began over fifty years ago, before the present editor was born. My own interest in the project was sparked as a graduate student twenty years ago, and half a decade has already elapsed since the role of editor was assigned to me. Over this span of time there have been six proposals in sequence for the completion of this project.

A. Proposals for Publishing the Grebel Letters

1. *The Original Proposal.* The initial plan was formally approved at the first regular meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society (MHS), November 7, 1924, and publicized in the *Goshen College Review Supplement* for January 1926. The biography and writings of Conrad Grebel were to have been one volume with three authors: Harold Bender, Ernst Correll, and Edward Yoder. The book "was planned to be modest in size and popular in character." Although it was to have been published in June 1925 as a quadricentennial volume celebrating the beginning of the Anabaptist movement, the discovery of new sources and the need to gain better command of the material led the authors to postpone publication. Subsequently, Yoder resumed teaching duties at Hesston College following completion of his doctoral studies, and Correll left Goshen College, making the three-way collaboration more difficult.

2. *The Yoder-Correll Proposal.* The next proposal was a two-page memorandum dated 1938 following the completion of Bender's doctoral dissertation on Grebel at the University of Heidelberg. It was sent from Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, where Yoder was now on the staff of the Mennonite Publishing House; and it emerged from "an extended discussion of the present status of the Grebeliana Studies" between Yoder and Correll, who was now Professor of Economic History at the American University

in Washington, D.C. The chief elements in the Yoder-Correll plan were (1) the publication of the Grebel letters in the original languages, (2) the publication of additional documents in the original languages not written by Grebel but related to the content of his letters, (3) an English translation of all the included letters and documents, (4) an extensive annotating of the letters and documents with philological, critical, biographical, and historical notes, and (5) the securing of a subsidy from some learned society or foundation for the financial underwriting of the project.

3. *The Bender-Hershberger Proposal.* On behalf of the directors of the MHS, Bender and Guy F. Hershberger replied jointly to the Yoder-Correll proposal, reporting their intention to reactivate the original plan as approved in 1924. That plan had not called for reprinting the letters and writings in the original languages because they were already accessible in transcribed and published form with only several exceptions. Nor had the plan called for a comprehensive or erudite annotating of the documents, but rather (as was indicated in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* when the Grebel-to-Myconius letters were published) the making of notes “as brief as seemed consistent with an intelligent understanding of the letters by the general reader,” plus some “references added for the convenience of those interested in the sources.” This counterproposal was greatly concerned about keeping the cost manageable in a time of severe economic depression. It was estimated that \$900 would still be needed to publish the biography and writings in a single volume much more condensed than the Yoder-Correll plan would have required.

4. *The Separate Publication of the Biography.* In 1950 the Bender biography of Conrad Grebel was published by Herald Press at Scottdale as Volume 6 in the “Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History” (SAMH) series of the MHS. The preface acknowledged the prior translation and research contributions of Yoder and Correll and explained why their further participation in the project had ceased and why the biography was published without the letters. Yoder had died in March 1945 and “the difficulty of financing the publication and other factors compelled the postponement of full publication and also led to the decision to publish in two volumes what was originally intended as one.” Bender added, “Dr. Correll . . . continues to look with me toward the completion of our original program of collaboration: a full presentation of all *Grebeliana* extant, with critical commentary and English translations of essential sections.”

5. *The Present Editor's Proposal.* The untimely death of H. S. Bender on September 21, 1962, and the retirement of Correll from research and teaching labors caused another indefinite postponement of the completion

of the project. The interest of the present writer in picking up the fallen baton began in the autumn of 1957 when Bender loaned me the Yoder translations for use in a graduate course at Northwestern University. Then in the autumn of 1972, following a sabbatical year during which I resumed this interest which had been dormant for yet another fifteen years, I received an informal mandate from the editors of the SAMH series to bring this project to completion as soon as possible. There was some question as to whether this essentially historical assignment should be entrusted to a sociologist, but it was recalled that Bender had once taught sociology at Goshen College and that Correll had been an economist. In November of that year, John H. Yoder, then serving as Associate Director of the Institute of Mennonite Studies (IMS) at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries (AMBS), secured approval for the idea of making this volume a joint project between the IMS and its "Classics of the Radical Reformation" (CRR) series and the MHS and its SAMH series. An advisory committee consisting of John H. Yoder, J. C. Wenger, Leonard Gross, and Cornelius J. Dyck was appointed and there was periodic review of manuscript contents and drafts.

6. *The Advisory Committee Enlargement.* In December 1977, the Advisory Committee took serious note of the way the manuscript had grown substantially larger than originally envisioned. However, instead of deleting any of the supplementary materials, the committee was of one mind that it would take little more time and effort to make the manuscript an even more comprehensive documentary of the beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism to 1527. The editor and two committee members—Yoder and Gross—were asked to search for any other documents which should still be included to tell a more complete story. Yoder subsequently recommended a number of items with particular reference to the pre-history of Zurich Anabaptism and the events leading up to the December 1523 "turning point in the Zwinglian Reformation," to use his phrase. Moreover, he wrote to Heinold Fast, Emden, Germany, eliciting several more recommendations. Gross suggested that the chronological coverage be extended to include an excerpt from the Bern Disputation of 1538 and recommended the composition of a "Cast of Characters" to round out the dramatic format for the book.

Finally after another half-decade of what Grebel would have called *vigiliae* (lamplight labors) or *lucubratio* (moonlighting), the book is nearing completion at this moment of writing. Its main purpose is still to publish a competent and readable English translation of the seventy-one Grebel letters together with other letters and documents that bear directly upon the themes and events in the Grebel letters, with sufficient notes to make the

material understandable to the general reader, including interested church members as well as students of Anabaptist history and theology. The documents accompanying the letters number approximately 100 in all. They relate to the Grebel letters in the following ways: (1) extant documents from his pen besides the letters (1B, 5B, 26A, 47D); (2) nonextant documents from his pen preserved only in a refracted form by others (71F, Epi.C); (3) statements by Grebel reported in minutes, court records, etc. (47C, 57C, 71K, 71M); (4) letters written to Grebel (Prologue, 1A, 54A, 67D, 67E); (5) documents that do not mention Grebel personally but are indirectly related to his involvement in the event or subject matter contained there, 7A, 9A, 19A, 25A, 47A, etc.); and (6) documents that mention Grebel's direct involvement in an event or conversation (all the rest). In place of publishing the texts in their original languages, I have put the key Latin or German phrases into the notes, indicating problems of variance in interpretation and translation. Moreover, transcriptions of the original texts of the letters and documents are otherwise available in published form; with the following exceptions: Prologue, 1A, 3A, 5B, 7A, 39A, 57E, and 67E. A number of documents in the present collection have common published sources as follows: the *Wyss Chronicle* (47B, 71R), (2) Bullinger's *Reformationsgeschichte* (68B, 68L, 71L, Epi.A), (3) Kessler's *Sabbata* (65A, 68F, 68H, 69A, 69E, 70A, 71E, 71J, 71R), and (4) Zwingli's *In Catabaptistarum Strophas Elenchus* (59A, 66A, 68F, 68L, 70D, 71J, 71N, Epi.B, and Epi.C).

B. Translations of the Letters and Documents

1. *Prior Translations.* To the editor's knowledge, the only piece of *Grebeliana* to have been translated prior to the present half-century-old project are the letters to Thomas Müntzer (63 and 64). There were five previous German editions between 1860 and 1962, and English translations were published by Walter Rauschenbusch (1905), George H. Williams (1957), and J. C. Wenger (1970). Perhaps additional research would identify other pieces that have been translated, especially from Latin into German. A small number of supplemental documents appeared in English translation, and these will be identified in Point 11, below, and in connection with each of these documents as it appears in the present collection.

2. *Edward Yoder Translations.* Yoder began his first-draft English translation of Grebel's Latin letters during his year of graduate studies at the University of Iowa, 1924-25. In a letter to Bender dated April 14, 1925, it is clear that Bender had contracted with him for such a translation and had provided photographs of the transcriptions from the *Vadianische Briefsammlung* (VB, 7 vols., 1888-1913) and the transcriptions from *Zwin-*

glis Briefwechsel (ZW, Vols. VII-X, 1916-29). The nine letters to Myconius had never been transcribed or published. Photographs of the originals had been sent to Correll by Hans Nabholtz, then director of the Zurich Staatsarchiv, where they were located. They were transcribed by Yoder, who wrote that "the orthography of the autographs is reproduced almost without change." Yoder's first-draft translation was continued the following year at the University of Pennsylvania, where he completed his doctoral studies in Latin; and the last two letters were sent to Bender on April 7, 1926. Yoder also translated a number of supplemental letters and documents from the Latin, which Bender and Correll used in their research.

3. *Bender-Correll Revisions*. Correll and Bender went over Yoder's draft, scribbling insertions and revisions. They based their insertions sometimes on an alternate rendering of the Latin but mostly on a preference for a different word order or selection. Thus, their revision constituted a rough second draft of Yoder's translation. Most of the revisions were in Correll's handwriting, indicating that he was doing much of the Grebel research at this stage. He went to Europe during the summer of 1926, spending full time in German and Swiss libraries. A 23-page handwritten report of findings which he sent to Bender from Zurich is preserved in the HSB files in the Mennonite Archives at Goshen, where a copy of this second-stage translation is also preserved, with only six letters missing.

4. *Edward Yoder Revision*. In 1929, Yoder, then serving as Professor of Greek and Latin at Hesston College in Kansas, completed what he considered to be "practically a final version, so far as I am concerned." Regarding his original draft he wrote, "I find that my first efforts four years ago were rather crude in spots, mostly due, I think, to my lack of background and perspective, but also partly to my immaturity in Latin. . . . I am making quite a few changes. I do not think there will be any great number of textual problems left over this time, with the help I have already had from Doctor Correll." Correll was teaching at the American University by this time, and it is evident that they were collaborating in the project somewhat independent of Bender. It is also evident that Yoder incorporated many of the Correll revision notes as he worked over his earlier translation. This draft also included first translations of the three Grebel-to-Vadian letters written in German, probably made by Correll and edited by Yoder. This draft also included Grebel's poem from Zwingli's *Archeteles* (47D). The original typewritten copy of this draft was bound and accessioned into the MHS, where it has been frequently used by students. The carbon copy retained by Yoder was graciously given to me by his widow, Estie Miller Yoder, in response to the request of my colleague, J. C. Wenger.

5. *The Alan Beck Translations.* In January 1972 I contracted with Alan Beck, then Honors Latin Scholar at Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, to make a fresh translation of Grebel's Latin letters, plus the Burgauer-to-Grebel letter (32A) and the Vadian-to-Grebel acknowledgment letter (1A). Working from the various published transcriptions identified above, he completed his draft with notes by July of that year, without prior reference to any of Yoder's translations.

6. *The David Sudermann Translations.* In the summer of 1972, I contracted with David Sudermann, then doctoral student in Medieval German at the University of Chicago, to make a fresh translation of the three Grebel-to-Vadian letters written in German (Nos. 66, 67, and 68), plus the Vadian-to-Grebel letter (67C), the three Jacob Grebel letters (9A, 23A, and 57A), and several German postscripts to earlier Latin letters.

7. *The John H. Yoder Translations.* At my request, John H. Yoder made independent translations of the same three Grebel-to-Vadian letters, using the more recent and accurate text from the Muralt and Schmidt source volume (Quellen 1). Yoder also translated the Hegenwald-to-Grebel letter (69D), using an unpublished, handwritten transcription made for Bender by the head librarian of the Stadtbibliothek (Vadiana) of St. Gallen, Switzerland—Theodor Schiess. Moreover, the translations of the Hubmaier speeches at the Second Zurich Disputation (57C) and the Veit Suter commentary on that disputation (57E) were made by Yoder.

8. *The Letters to Müntzer.* The four prior English translations listed above, plus a new and independent translation made by Elizabeth Horsch Bender, were collated and a newly edited version produced.

9. *The Elizabeth Horsch Bender Translations.* Apart from the combined work of the three originators of the project, the largest contribution to its completion has been made by Elizabeth Bender. For the past half decade (not to mention her earlier collaboration with the original trio), she has worked closely with the present editor, chiefly in making new translations of more than forty supplemental German documents taken from the Wyss *Chronicle*, the Egli *Aktensammlung*, the Kessler *Sabbata*, the Muralt-Schmidt and Fast source volumes (Quellen 1 and 2), and *Huldreich Zwingli's Sämtliche Werke* (ZW, Vols. I-X), including the major parts of three anti-Anabaptist treatises by Zwingli heretofore unavailable in English (67C, 69C, and 70C).

10. *Other Translations from the Latin and Dutch.* The first and last documents in the collection, both written by Vadian, were translated by two scholars, respectively, at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.: John Hickey-Williams, PhD Cand in Greek Patristics, and Robert Eno, SS, STD (Institut Catholique de Paris), Associate Professor

of Church History in the University's School of Religious Studies. Mr. Hickey-Williams previously served on the editorial staff for the publication of English translations of early Christian texts (*The Fathers of the Church*, published by the CUA Press) and was an Andrew Mellon Foundation Fellow in Early Christian Humanism. The 11-page document which he translated was the dedication letter found at the front of Vadian's published text of a book on meteors by the fifteenth-century Italian humanist, poet, and statesman, Giovanni Pontanus. The essay was Vadian's philosophy of education, addressed to his 18-year-old student from Zurich. The existence of this document was unknown to any of the scholars previously associated with the Grebel research, and Mr. Hickey-Williams worked with a photocopy of an original edition which I acquired from the Stadtbibliothek of Zurich. Despite Vadian's difficult style and penchant for the more abstract medieval Latin vocabulary, Mr. Hickey-Williams and Fr. Eno produced accurate readable translations that provide important termini for this source volume—the first dated six months prior to the first extant letter by Grebel, and the last dated fourteen years after Grebel's death.

The translation of 57A, which is Zwingli's defense of his booklet on the mass canon which he addressed to the Grebel group, was made by Daniel Sheerin, Associate Professor of Classical and Medieval Latin, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The translation of 68F(3), known as the "Klettgau letter," chronicling the first Zurich baptismal service, was made from the Dutch by C. J. Dyck, Professor of Historical Theology at AMBS, Elkhart.

11. *The Reprinting of Existing Translations.* Some of the documents included in the collection come from previously published translations—25A, 47D, 47F, 57F, 59A, 66A, 67B, 68C, 68E, 68F(1), 68L(2), 68L(3), 69D, 71J(3), 71M(1), and Epi.C—revised and incorporated with the permission of copyright owners.

12. *Editing and Completing the Translations.* The editor's role has been largely to fulfill the second half of the original publication plan as revised by Bender when, instead of a single volume, he projected a companion volume to his Grebel biography of 1950. As already indicated, the present edition of the Grebel letters is based on two or more translations of each. An attempt was made to solve all problems of variant translations and to report such differences in the notes when significant. In addition to the supplemental documents listed above, about a dozen were translated by the editor himself—3A, 5B, 19A, 39A, 47E, 47G, 67A, 68B, 68L(1), 71F, 71N, 71P, and Epi.A(1). The producing of the notes was a formidable task, made easier by the prior work of many scholars, especially the editors

of the source volumes from which the translators worked—ZW, Quellen 1, and Quellen 2. The editor's dependence on the copious notes of Fritz Blanke in ZW, VI, No. 108, will be apparent in the annotations for Epi.B.

A number of students at AMBS assisted in the translation of notes from the German, especially Peter Letkemann, Franz Wiebe, Heide Koop, and Mary Klassen. Two members of the St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship assisted in a similar way—Rosemarie Matsuda and Cornelius Buhler. With the aid of these and other sources, a diligent attempt was made to identify every name, place, and event mentioned in the letters and documents. Names or subjects occurring more than once were cross-referenced, using a comprehensive index of the letters and documents prepared by a summer high school assistant, Rita Hartman. The cross-referencing is done by document, page, and line, as follows: 63/260/12 = Document 63, page 260, line 12. After the page proofs arrived, Sue Ramseyer prepared the revised index and Bret Kincaid converted all of the cross references. Because Bret used a conversion table to correlate the new page proofs with the manuscript pages, thus avoiding the tedious task of rechecking every cross reference, the new line numbers will sometimes be off by a line or two. For all of these suffering servants of a shared scholarship, the editor is deeply grateful.

Leland Harder, Director
Great Plains Seminary Education Program
North Newton, Kansas
January 21, 1985
(the 460th birthday of Swiss Anabaptism)

Introduction

The subject matter of the Conrad Grebel letters is distinctly different from that of the other volumes in the MHS or IMS series. Although some of the letters have historical content adjunct to that of the first eighteen “Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History,” and some even have doctrinal materials not unlike those of the first two “Classics of the Radical Reformation” source volumes, none of them is basically in the category either of historical documentation or doctrinal interpretation. Of all the extant letters, the two to Müntzer come closest to the aim of doctrinal explanation, and Grebel’s post-conversion letters begin to chronicle an emerging radical Reformation movement; yet, they are all basically personal letters reflecting an inward pilgrimage of struggle and faith and not the chronicling of a movement or the defense of its doctrines.

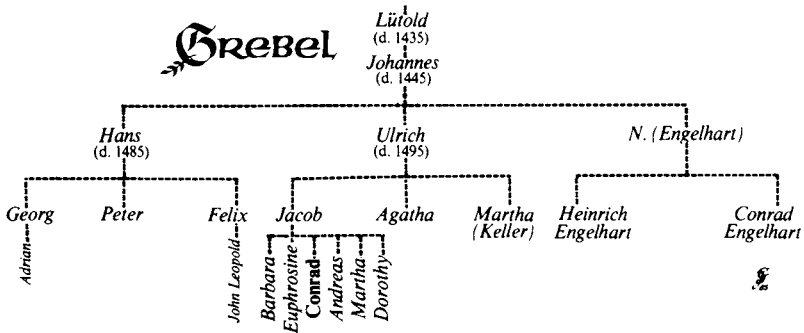
Grebel’s nonextant *Taufbüchlein* (which Zwingli called the *libellus confutatio*, book of counterarguments), found in refracted form in Epi.C, might have qualified as theological argument; but the fact is that Grebel more than once admitted that his gift was in another area. He looked to Hätzer and Hubmaier to do the doctrinal explaining and considered his own work to be more in the arena of proclaiming the message and establishing the church of true believers. Therefore, the rationale for this volume is somewhat different from the others in the two series.

Except for its overly polemical and personal implications, the title *Confessions of an Anabaptist Ringleader* might have been used for this book. The term “Anabaptist ringleader” comes from the Latin *catabaptistarum coryphaeus*, which Zwingli applied to Grebel (see Epi.A/463/2) with a polemical meaning that Grebel might not have totally rejected. The term “confessions” is an apt description of the content of Grebel’s letters to Vadian, his father confessor. He often used terms like these to describe his relationship to his former teacher: “You counsel me so well and like a

father that I do not know whether my own father has acted as well the part of a counselor in my affairs” (5/72/30-32). Spanning seven of the last eight years of Grebel’s life, these letters have the characteristic of free-associative expression. Toward the end of one long letter in which he was aware that his thought had been given free rein, he wrote, “All this I have blabbed out so that from the top of the head to the bottom of the feet, inside and outside the skin, you can observe my whole posture, attitude, affection” (6/80/33-35). Because they are so confessional in content, these letters are an extraordinary repository of subjective data for the behavioral analysis of the true believer, and we are indebted to Vadian and a dozen generations of St. Gallen archivists for the fact that they are still available nearly half a millennium later. A volume of documents portraying how one bright young Swiss patriot became a fervent, influential leader of the Anabaptist movement is long overdue in the rediscovery of Reformation roots. It might well have been the first volume in the series, for it is the beginning point in the portrayal of the tragic drama of the left wing of the Reformation.

Indeed, the basic format for this book is the drama with five acts, prologue, and epilogue. The cast of characters includes a total of 107 names. The main characters are Conrad Grebel, the Anabaptist ring-leader, and Huldrych Zwingli, the vicar at the Grossmünster in Zurich. Joachim von Watt, MA, MD, better known as Vadian, is the trusted correspondent of both men before and after their alienation from each other; and through him much of the tense dialogue is filtered. The script is supplied by the 170 letters and documents. There is much monologue in this drama, although it fits the soliloquy of ancient and medieval theater. The actions of the characters are suggested to the imagination of the reader through the words they speak, expressing love and hate, consent and dissent, humor and heartache.

Involved in all of the actions is the extended family of Grebel:



They were residents of Zurich since the late fourteenth century, when Lütold Grebel, the great-great grandfather of Conrad, left his native Kaiserstuhl, a village on the Rhine, to become a citizen of Zurich in 1386. They belonged to the landed nobility by virtue of possession of a family estate at Kloten near Zurich, giving Jacob Grebel, father of Conrad, the title of Junker. Family revenue came also from an iron business begun by Ulrich Grebel and carried on by his son, Jacob, with some help from his grandson, Conrad (see 23/119/26). They belonged to the patrician guild, "zur Meise," with various members of each generation serving as guildmaster, usually with membership in Zurich's Great Council, Lütold from 1420-30, Johannes from 1428-44, Jacob from 1494-1526, etc. The family history included governorships (Jacob in Grüningen, Felix in Rheinthal, and Conrad Engelhart in Hyburg), membership in Zurich's Small Council (Jacob from 1512-26), and appointment to various missions on behalf of Zurich, such as legate to the diet of the Swiss League, deputy to peace negotiations, etc. Felix Grebel carried an official message to the pope, and Jacob was sent on more than thirty missions from 1521-26 (see Schelbert, p. 37).

The family tradition also included service in the church, with Peter Grebel, a canon in the Grossmünster, Aunt Agatha and sister Euphrosine, nuns in the Oetenbach Convent, and Heinrich Engelhart, the pastor at the Fraumünster. More significant for the dramatic events depicted by the letters and documents, members of the Grebel family displayed the whole spectrum of attitudes toward the Zwinglian Reformation. Peter Grebel was an adherent of the old faith who believed that Zwingli's reforms were radical and heretical. Heinrich Engelhart was an intimate colleague of Zwingli, willing to sacrifice his own office in the canonry so that Zwingli could replace him and thereby be relieved of his obligations to the diocesan bishop in Constance. Conrad Grebel was a Zwinglian disciple who also came to the conclusion that the Zurich strategy of reform was diabolical, not for being too radical but for not being radical enough to follow through on the very biblical principles that Zwingli had first proclaimed. Jacob Grebel was a moderate who supported Zwingli and tried to remain conciliatory toward the adherents of the old faith. The conflict was deadly. On the conservative end of the spectrum, Peter was finally forced to resign his benefice and move to the Roman Catholic bailiwick of Baden. At the radical pole, Conrad was finally imprisoned for life and died as an escaped fugitive. Caught in the middle, Jacob was beheaded for treason.

The Prologue takes us to the University of Vienna, where Vadian, a professor of classical literature, composes a vision for young Conrad's education. Act 1 features Conrad as the brilliant, promising student who

writes the first of seventy-one letters, addressed to none other than Huldrych Zwingli, then the people's priest in Einsiedeln, thirty miles southeast of Zurich. Grebel confides in Zwingli, patron of Swiss university students, that he respects Vadian very much but that he longs to go to Paris to study under Glarean, who is still the greatest of Swiss teachers. The letter is supplemented by a memo from Vadian, published in the Vienna edition of his best known work, *Commentary on Pomponius Mela*, reiterating what he had already said in the Prologue that Grebel was a student of extraordinary potential for scholarship and leadership, if only he would apply himself to the liberal arts with a sprinkle of theology and a dash of rhetoric. In Vienna, Grebel applies himself to the art of sword-fighting; and following a brawl in which he nearly loses his hand, he is called home by his angry father. From Zurich he writes letters to Vadian and Zwingli anticipating (with Myconius, schoolmaster at the Grossmünster) the return of Vadian and a great celebration when he visits Zurich. The celebration takes the form of an expedition to the top of Mt. Pilatus by Vadian, Grebel, Myconius, and Zimmermann, recounted by Vadian in the Basel edition of the *Pomponius Mela*.

As Act 1 comes to an end, Grebel moves to Paris to study with Glarean, but not before expressing his hope that Vadian meanwhile might meet and marry his sister Martha. And Myconius takes up permanent residence in his hometown of Luzern, where he will receive nine of Grebel's letters and from where he will serve as mediator between Conrad and his alienated parents. Then at a later crucial point in the drama, Zwingli will call Myconius back to Zurich to assist in the work of the Reformation.

Act 2 features Conrad, the prodigal, living in Glarean's dormitory at the University of Paris, but getting distracted by too many quarrels, too much drinking, too much spending on "belly, books, and clothes," too many visits to prostitutes, and too much display of temper when certain bandits attack. It appears that he and several of his friends fight back, and several Frenchmen are killed. When the repercussions are almost more than he can bear, Grebel blames his father for getting him into this mess by misusing his influence in high government to secure questionable foreign stipends and failing to teach his sons to live within their means "on what has been earned." Apart from their paranoid overtones, these indictments prove to be incredibly prophetic when read in the context of the father's trial and execution eight years later (see Epi.A). But in Act 2, the father comes on stage only to announce the marriage of his daughter Martha to Vadian; and the facts that the match was his idea in the first place and that the father will not allow him to come home for the celebration throw Conrad into utter despair.

In Act 3, Conrad returns home to Zurich with a consequent, although temporary, uplift in mood. He is elated to be back, grateful to Myconius for reconciling his angry parents, ecstatic at Vadian's long-awaited letter which he "fondles the way children do with a rattle." When the reality of his parents' foibles returns into focus, he demonstrates his sharp wit by writing amusing descriptions of his mother's erratic behavior in one 24-hour period and his father's penchants for wine and pretty girls. He begins again to write poetry and tries to interest Vadian in reading the *Iliad* together in the original Greek. His father appears on stage again to make payment on Martha's dowry, and Myconius sends along a guilder owed by a friend. But then Conrad returns to his "rather more sullen" temperament, triggered by the deaths of Zwingli's brother Andrew and his own sister Euphrosine, a nun with malice toward none. His spirits are revived somewhat by the announcement that he has gotten himself a sweetheart, "my desire," as he calls her. This infatuation does not help his relationship with his parents because the girl appears to be resident in the local convent without dowry or character references. Through this and other dimensions of his struggles, Conrad is the seeker, searching for the door that opens to ultimate freedom, knowing there must be such a door, but not yet finding it. So, like Ulrich von Hutten, the knight, he "gambles and casts the dice" and runs off to Basel with Barbara, his "ganze welt," his "holokosme." They take an apartment and Conrad goes to work for Cratander, the famous book publisher, with special assignment to proofread the Basel edition of Vadian's *Pomponius Mela*.

Act 4 is the turning point in Conrad's life following the deepest agony of his soul. He is back in Zurich and takes advantage of a week's absence of his father on state business to marry Barbara. This is a mixed blessing because of the relentless opposition of his parents, his own awful sense of guilt and emptiness, and a weird premonition that his "Barbarity" will eventually betray him—another self-fulfilling prophecy. Nine months elapse before he writes again; and when he does, he is playing a new role as Zwingli's advocate and helper. And so he writes to Vadian, "Would that by the grace of God all would pray for me that I accept this ministry in earnest and triumph in it." The seven supplemental documents between letters 47 and 48 fill some of the gaps of information. He has become the vanguard for Zwingli's Reformation offensive, and apparently not without the reformer's blessing. His is a radicalizer role that is acceptable and functional at this stage of Zwingli's movement but that is destined eventually to alienate him from his leader after the movement has gained control of the social order and there is the troublesome resort to compromise in order to conserve the gains that have been won. As Act 4 comes to a close with the

momentous Second Zurich Disputation in October 1523, the mystery character is no longer Grebel but Zwingli, whose vacillation between the radicalism of his address to the Bishop of Constance (47D) and the conservatism of his “‘Introduction’ to the Disputation Findings” (58A) becomes the new enigma in the unfolding drama.

Act 5 portrays the estrangement in the Zwinglian Reformation when the radicalizers are rejected by their leader and form their own Anabaptist church without his approval. The turning point occurs in December 1523 when Zwingli forsakes his promise to celebrate the new evangelical communion on Christmas Day and when Grebel comes to the realization that “the cause of the gospel is in a very bad way here.” The climax of the drama occurs in January 1525 when Grebel performs the first rebaptisms, signaling the founding of the new church. During the year 1524, Grebel keeps Vadian informed of developments; and his brother-in-law responds with a certain appreciation for the struggle in Zurich because he is having his own not dissimilar confrontations with Benedict Burgauer, the conservative vicar of the church in St. Gallen. Vadian wants to know more about Grebel’s correspondence with the reformers of Wittenberg—Luther, Carlstadt, and Hegenwald.

The year ends with Zwingli’s first published tract against the radical proponents of believers’ baptism and an exchange of letters between Grebel and Vadian in which are heard especially poignant expressions revealing an emerging disagreement between the two brothers-in-law, who had long been closer than blood brothers. “Would that we were brothers-in-the-truth-of-Christ” writes Grebel. To which Vadian replies, “My wish concerning you would be and always has been that you conduct yourself with humble propriety toward Zwingli and Leo and not be so demanding and contentious, with awareness that they are the ones who are engaged in furthering the Word of truth and are not able abruptly to throw out everything that has come into misuse through so many years.” But Grebel observes that “Zwingli is writing about rebels or rebellion,” prophesying that “this may well hit us. Look out! It will bring something. I do not think that persecution will fail to come.” Once more Grebel’s prophecy comes to pass. Four weeks later the Zurich City Council issues its first anti-Anabaptist mandate, and those members of Grebel’s circle who are not native to Zurich (Reublin, Brötli, Hätzer, and Castelberger) are banished from the country.

In a touching letter to Castelberger as the latter closes out his bookstore in Zurich in preparation for his exile, Grebel asks him to sell his own precious books, for he too is leaving Zurich. Then as the St. Gallen chronicler, Kessler, tells the story of Grebel’s missionary work north to Schaff-

hausen and east to St. Gallen, where he baptized several hundred persons in the River Sitter on Palm Sunday, we can almost picture the executioners, preparing the stake and arranging the firewood as three of his brothers in the faith become the first martyrs of the movement.

Another scene spotlights the coincidence of letters to Vadian written the end of May only two days apart, one from Zwingli (accompanying shipment of multiple copies of his second anti-Anabaptist treatise) and the other from Grebel (the last personal letter he wrote to anyone, so far as is known). As Zwingli puts it, “You see me fighting hard and bitterly with these enemies of the gospel.” And Grebel pleads, “Turn away from the bloody faction of Zwingli, flee from your own to the divine wisdom so that you become a fool to the world but wise to the Lord. Become as a child or you cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

Zwingli’s next letter to Vadian, dated the following October, reports the arrest and imprisonment of Grebel and Blaurock; and the drama moves swiftly into the events of their trial (including another public disputation on baptism) and their sentencing to life imprisonment on a diet of bread, mush, and water, including the announcement that henceforth unrepentant Anabaptists who are citizens of Zurich will be executed by drowning, and may God have mercy on their souls.

The next scene, following six months of imprisonment, is the mysterious escape of the Anabaptists on March 21, 1526. The two men who tell the story to the Zurich court are fellow prisoners too sick and weak to succeed in their getaway. The third witness is not an Anabaptist but testifies to having met Grebel on his flight in the direction of Glattfelden. Act 5 ends with the St. Gallen chronicler telling about the death of Grebel in Maienfeld in the Oberland and the execution of Mantz in Zurich soon after.

The Epilogue features an incredible series of documents that put the whole drama of Grebel’s Anabaptist activities into variegated perspectives, like the successive shakings of a kaleidoscope—the weird trial and execution of Conrad’s aged father (which one historian calls “Zwingli’s liquidation of Jacob Grebel”) and the eerie conversation between Zwingli and Grebel’s “ghost in hell,” the single-mindedness of Zwingli’s irreversible compulsion to destroy the Anabaptist movement, the witness of the next two Anabaptist martyrs in Zurich, the survival power of the movement in other Swiss cantons, and Vadian’s final reflections on the whole drama fourteen years after Grebel’s death. Although neither Zwingli nor Vadian can change his mind about the illegitimacy of the Anabaptist dissent, neither can he get the dissenters out of his mind. “It seems funny to strive with ghosts,” writes Zwingli. “With the greatest obstinacy, he began to

examine thoughts once fixed and firm,” writes Vadian. The Anabaptist ringleader is gone, but the dialogue continues in a kind of mysterious universal perspective.

And now 4½ centuries later, the dialogue resumes in our Sunday schools, college and seminary classrooms, and ecumenical convocations. Neither Zwingli nor Grebel had a corner on the truth; but by the grace of their same Lord, each had a corner of the truth. Neither was totally in error; but under the influence of the prince of darkness, whom both acknowledged as a satanic power in men’s lives, both contributed in different ways to the tearing asunder of Christ’s church. Perhaps in the presence of the prince of light, their unresolved differences were ultimately seen in true perspective; but our piecemeal search for the truth proceeds meanwhile, “for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.”

These letters and documents are not published for scholars only but for all seekers and believers who have the will to read this drama, not as disinterested spectators but as persons who are themselves actors in the universal tragicomedy of the human predicament and God’s gracious sending of his Son that we might know the truth and live by it forevermore.

Cast of Characters

In Alphabetical Order
(For character profiles with references to the
letters and documents, see pp. 527ff.)

1. Aberli, Heinrich
2. Ab-Iberg, Fridli
3. Ammann, John Jacob
Andreas on the Crutches (see
Castelberger)
Balthasar (see Hubmaier)
4. Binder, Jörg
5. Blaurock, Jörg
Bodenstein (see Carlstadt)
6. Bolt, Eberli
7. Bosshart, Marx
8. Brennwald, Heinrich
9. Brennwald, Karl
10. Brötli, Hans
11. Burgauer, Benedict
12. Carlstadt, Andreas
13. Castelberger, Andreas
14. Charles V, Emperor
Clivanus (see Collin)
15. Coct, Anemund de
16. Collin, Rudolph
17. Cratander, Andreas
De Coct (see Coct)
De Falconibus (see Falconibus)
Dominik (see Zili)
Eberli, Bolt (see Bolt, Eberli)
Enderli (see Castelberger)
18. Engelhart, Conrad
19. Engelhart, Heinrich
20. Erasmus, Desiderius
21. Escher, Hans Conrad
22. Falconibus, William de
23. Falk, Jacob
Felix (see Mantz)
24. Ferdinand I, Archduke
25. Filonardi, Ennius
26. Francis I, King
27. Giger, Gabriel
28. Glarean, Heinrich
29. Grebel, Adrian
30. Grebel, Agatha
31. Grebel, Andreas
32. Grebel, Barbara (1)
33. Grebel, Barbara (2)
34. Grebel, Conrad
35. Grebel, Dorothy
36. Grebel, Euphrosine
37. Grebel, Felix
38. Grebel, Jacob
39. Grebel, John Leopold
40. Grebel, Martha
41. Grebel, Peter
42. Grossmann, Caspar
43. Hätzer, Ludwig
44. Hedinger, Jörg
45. Hochrütiner, Lorenz
46. Hofmeister, Sebastian
47. Hohenlandenber, Hugo von
48. Hottinger, Claus
49. Hottinger, Hans
50. Hottinger, Jacob
51. Hottinger, Margaret
52. Hottinger, Rudolf
53. Hotz, Hans

54. Hubmaier, Balthasar
55. Hujuff, Hans
Huldrych (see Zwingli)
56. Hutten, Ulrich von
Hypolitus (see Bolt)
57. Joner, Wolfgang
Jörg of the House of Jacob (see
Blaurock)
58. Jud, Leo
Juflius (see Wetter)
Kern (see Krüsi)
59. Kessler, Johann
60. Krüsi, Hans
Kürsiner (see Roggenacher)
61. Lambert, Franz
Landenberg (see Hohenlanden-
berg)
62. Lehman, Felix
63. Leo X, Pope
Lincki (see Lingg)
64. Lingg, Marty
Lorenz (see Hochrütiner)
Loriti (see Glarean)
65. Luther, Martin
66. Mantz, Anna
67. Mantz, Felix
68. Maximilian I, Emperor
Megander (see Grossmann)
69. Müntzer, Thomas
70. Myconius, Oswald
Nagel (see Krüsi)
71. Ockenfuss, Hans
Oggenfuss (see Ockenfuss)
Pannicellus (see Brötli)
Pfister (see Pur)
72. Puccius, Antonio
73. Pur, Bartlime
74. Reimann, Heine
75. Reublin, Wilhelm
76. Ritter, Erasmus
77. Roggenacher, Anthony
78. Röist, Diethelm
79. Röist, Mark
80. Sattler, Michael
81. Schappeler, Christoph
82. Schinner, Matthew
83. Schmid, Conrad
84. Schumacher, Fridli
Schorant (see Uliman)
Sertorius (see Schappeler)
Simon (see Stumpf)
85. Stumpf, Simon
86. Trinkler, Ulrich
87. Tschudi, Peter
88. Tschudi, Valentin
89. Uliman, Wolfgang
90. Ulrich, Duke of Württemberg
91. Ursinus, Caspar
92. Uttinger, Heinrich
93. Vadian, Joachim
Velius (see Ursinus)
Verulanus (see Filonardi)
94. Walder, Heinrich
95. Wanner, Johann
Watt, von (see Vadian)
Weniger (see Lingg)
96. Westerburg, Gerhard
97. Wetter, Sebastian Wolfgang
98. Widerker, Anna
Wilhelm (see Reublin)
99. Wirz, Hans
100. Wirz, Heinrich
101. Wüst, Michael
102. Wyss, Bernhard
103. Xylotectus, John
104. Zili, Dominik
Zimmermann (see Xylotectus)
105. Zwick, Johann
106. Zwingli, Huldrych

PROLOGUE

1517

Prologue A Vadian's Vision for Grebel's Education Vienna, February 28, 1517

It is fitting to begin and end our source volume on the rise of the Anabaptist movement under the leadership of Conrad Grebel with two letters from the pen of Vadian, his university teacher, "father-confessor," and brother-in-law. Both make reference to Grebel as unusually talented. But the first is full of hope for his future, while the other is saturated with disappointment with his past. Early in their relationship Vadian wrote not only one but two public letters to his bright and promising student—the first one dedicating to Grebel his literary work on Pontanus (see fn. 40, below) and the second a tribute to him at the end of his 1518 edition of Pomponius Mela (see 1A/Intro.).

The title page for the former work, translated from the Latin, appeared as follows: "Jovianus Giovanni Pontanus, inspired poet, and his work on meteors to his son L. Francisco. Together with an epistle by Vadian in which is beautifully explained how polished literature and the noble arts are joined together." Vadian's book was published in Vienna, presumably in Lucas Alantsee's printshop, sometime after February 28, 1517, when the letter to Grebel was written. Apparently only one copy remains, to be found in the Zurich Zentralbibliothek. It had originally belonged to Adrian Wirth, one of

"My dear Conrad, you should take this to heart. . . . You should develop a method by which you undertake a steadfast pursuit of knowledge and a gentle pursuit of words, because it is a matter of great importance to learn both the ideas and the art of communicating them."

—Vadian to Grebel, February 28, 1517.

the reformer-priests of Stammheim who were executed by confederate reactionaries in the Ittinger affair in 1524 (see 65/fn. 24).

The work has never been transcribed or reprinted and more research is needed concerning it. The translation presented here was made for the editor from a photocopy of the original by Mr. John Hickey-Williams of the Catholic University of America. To save space, only 62 percent of the letter is included, but sufficient to reveal Vadian's vision for the proper education of Conrad Grebel—model student.

A letter of Joachim Vadian¹ of Switzerland,² Poet Laureate of the Emperor, to his student, Conrad Grebel of Zurich, Switzerland, a noble young man of exceptional talent.

Today, dearest Conrad,³ many people who are not in fact unlearned, think that their time and best efforts are spent well and to greatest advantage when their perpetual desire, to speak in jest, is that they may acquire for themselves by anxious recitation prolonged all the way to their gray hair the rich exuberance of the Greek and Latin languages. Whereupon to me, their opinion may be no more commendable than the madness of those who attribute nothing at all to the luster of language or the properties and elegance of vocabulary.

There is error, it seems to me, in both directions, for we cannot attain a knowledge of things without careful attention to vocabulary. Nor can even the most polished vocabulary devoid of any connection to a knowledge of many things have much benefit by itself. Hence those who are devoted to matters worthy of inquiry are freer of blame. They are pronouncing something for the sake of the advancement and excellence of the human mind, so that they seem to be keen on knowing, which is itself very natural to the human person. . . .

On the other hand, those who exhaust a stream of words and who, while neglecting the reality expressed, embrace the artificial ornamentation of words and do not feast on the whole hare are not only unlearned and uneducated but they are also ignorant of who they are. For they do not stretch their minds as much as they should in accordance with reason's dictates and the prescription of the human situation. . . . Such minds receive the pity of Apuleius⁴ in his *de mundo*,⁵ written for his son Faustinus: "They extol the heights of Nysa⁶ and the hinterlands of Cirrha,⁷ the sanctuaries of Olympus⁸ and the steeps of Ossa,⁹ and other isolated details of this sort. For they are seized by an insatiable admiration for objects of such mediocre value and insignificance. That these things exist (he says) is not so wonderful to them since they no longer wonder about the existence of anything greater, nor do they stretch to a reality worthy of more exacting observation. On the other hand, if they had been able to observe the

earth and the whole universe at once, they would realize that the tiny details and single parts of the world merit less praise than the totality of which they are a part.”¹⁰ End of comment.

As I was saying, we should commend the person who acquires a rich vocabulary for himself with equal devotion to the noble arts¹¹ and to the most eloquent writers,¹² and especially the reestablished ones (unless, of course, a subject demands greater effort). To be sure, they tend to approach those disciplines that are concerned in any way with present places, times, races, or nations, without much capacity for work; for they are learned, it is believed, without difficulty through a process of analogy with daily events that occur. With respect to the eminent arts, however, while there are many and their individual purposes are almost distinct, none are considered by learned men to be more outstanding than those that encompass nature and divine truth from which the entire power of nature emanates.

The most outstanding among these is called theology.¹³ It was eagerly attempted by the Greeks, Chaldeans, and Egyptians, and even more directly by the Hebrews. It has been done anew by us, however, since Jesus, the Lord of life and truth, appeared. But would that this faith were as pure today as it used to be! Would that it had not become entangled and confused by so many Aristotelian traditions over the past four hundred years more or less!¹⁴ For if I am not mistaken, the trouble over scholastic investigations and the alliance of Aristotle and our faith has become more intense since the rise of the orders of the mendicant friars (as they are called).¹⁵ Inasmuch as many ardently praise this development, however, I will not object to it, especially since it appeared at the famous University of Paris!¹⁶

On second thought,¹⁷ you could say that the branch of learning that concerns itself with God and matters divine is no more noble than astronomy, for with a degree of certitude greater than the human mind seems capable of acquiring, it deals with the power, distance, and movements of the larger bodies of the heavens devoid of natural corruption.

The next place is occupied by those sciences which carefully examine the sources, causes, characteristics and activity of things consisting of a variable (although in this context I should say elemental)¹⁸ nature. Then follow those co-sciences which study the location of places, the distance between them, and the currents of the weather and all those things which nature generally displays at random, one time or another, not by their single appearance but by the alternation of elements that are in them. Our scholars have resolved to call these sciences metaphysics,¹⁹ just as the Greeks called them physics.²⁰

With no temerity whatever,²¹ I add here that distinguished profession, medicine, which is the most noble of all those arts whose benefit is bestowed on mortal man. This is true in my judgment because it is the dutiful servant of the mysterious and marvelous works of nature and has been linked in every way by an intimate connection with that very nature.

Although the branches of learning which pertain to the laws²² and virtues of people and to the principles of equity and justice are manifold and have a rightful place, I do not overlook them (unless my judgment deceives me) when I include here only those which are suitable for all men and requisite for the administration of public government. Is there anyone who lives his private life well who does not discern between virtue and vice? Is there anyone who conducts his life with others well who does not have a norm for what is right and just? It is to be admitted, therefore, that these disciplines are indeed important and practical but with respect to their practice and method are less distinguished than those previously mentioned because the latter somehow seize and inflame the mind that has already advanced a little farther and is beginning to examine more deeply.²³

The former disciplines usually nourish the mind with the sweet knowledge of nature's great mysteries²⁴ or with a certain divine ambrosia.²⁵ Moreover, just as the horses are led out of the starting gate onto the race-track during the games, these disciplines lead out the native quickness of our minds incarcerated in the prison of weak bodies for a brief time (for indeed life is not long for us). [They ride them] through the earth, through the sea, through the sky, and through the heavens as well as the invulnerable structure of the celestial universe glittering with perpetual fires to an awesome respect for the total work of such a great Creator and to an understanding of its particular parts. For the human mind is capable of such understanding in proportion to the relationship between one's ability and one's endeavors and to the extent that we shall attain the goal as if for the awarding of an Olympic crown.²⁶ I am convinced, therefore, that there is in the universe a certain sustenance for the peaceful soul which no copious speech, no smooth diction, nor poetry, no matter how subtle the metaphor, can equal or excel.

This is not what I would say concerning God and divine truth, for which the mind is of less importance.²⁷ Indeed those in our religion who have purged the powers of their mind know better. With them contemplation can be so efficacious toward God that the mind, intent on God, elevates the body along with it, as stated in the thirteenth²⁸ book of *Platonic Theology* by Marsilio Ficino.²⁹ Speech, therefore, usually consists of those things which, having been humanly learned by studying nature, clarify and

create a ready approach to divine things. In *Phaedo*,³⁰ Plato recalls these divine things when he states that the minds of philosophers acquire the wings by which one can fly to divine reality. . . .

But to return to our original point of digression. It seems to me that a bright person of honest judgment can bestow nothing on his language without a knowledge of the world. On the other hand, he can never bestow as much grandeur on his knowledge of the world when it is expressed in lowly speech and improper words as is usually produced by the pleasing facility of speech that flows aptly, fittingly. . . . But this fact is certainly not appreciated by those who prefer to be considered eloquent rather than learned, and thus neglect the rigorous disciplines. They are like starving poets, growing thin for lack of substance because they have been intent on their pleasure alone. Their total effort is directed at perambulating about the garden prepared for their delight; but it is devoid of any fruitbearing land. For such as these the ultimate aim of their study is to know the accomplishments of Philip in Macedonia and Greece, Artaxerxes in Egypt, Alexander in Asia, and Caesar in Gaul.³¹ O such beautiful little minds, such delicate and little souls!

Codrus³² writes (although not everyone ascribes the statement to him)³³ that Aristotle used to say that those who pursue other disciplines but scorn philosophy are like the suitors of Penelope during Ulysses' absence.³⁴ Since they could not have the lady, they used to flirt with the maidservants. Those who do not know how to link words with substantive knowledge are of the same lot, since they cultivate language but have nothing to say. . . .

My dear Conrad, you should take this to heart. Otherwise you might seem to some to be pursuing another course, either by a sloth that is blameworthy or an intellect that is weak. Because it is a matter of great importance to learn both the ideas and the art of communicating them, you should develop a method such that you undertake a steadfast pursuit of knowledge and a gentle pursuit of words. For in this way you will achieve your goal, as though on one course but with two chariots. Consequently the poetic words of Horace³⁵ should be recalled: "To discern is the source and font of writing well. The socratic pages can set forth your matter, and when the matter is in hand the words will not be loath to follow." . . .

Although the preceding days of winter have been spent in translating for a government stipend³⁶ the fifteenth book of the *Bibliotheca* of Diodorus Siculus³⁷ where he narrates the accomplishments of Philip of Macedon, and although Alexander the Great, who has been picturesquely narrated by Dionysius³⁸ in the sixteenth³⁹ book, remains to be done (for I must devote myself to its translation next February), I am making provi-

sion for an author who is very eloquent but also very learned whom I shall translate for the benefit of you and those like you so that no one will say poets are barren. . . .

Many others whom I have considered do not hit the mark as well as Pontanus.⁴⁰ He is certainly the most learned of all the poets of our day whom I have read on this side of the controversy. In the work entitled *Liber Meteororum*, he has explained with an unusual felicity befitting talent correct usage and substantive ideas which usually do not seem capable of such eloquent expression. Moreover, he exhibits outstanding learning which should be read by those fond of polished expression. I have explained my opinions on his talent in the twenty-ninth chapter of my *Poetica*.⁴¹ You will receive from this outstanding writer what your own talent longs for. Indeed, you will receive something very useful both from his knowledge of the excellence of nature and from the well constructed elegance of the poem. And gradually you will ascend on the right path through those things which are more evident and more familiar to those which can only be acquired gradually. This, as Aristotle taught, is the ascent of understanding.

I know that from writers on the elements,⁴² you have already learned the natural causes of various effects which inspire wonder for many people; namely, the source of dew and of hail, the source of the rivers and springs that flow continually from the mountains, the nature of thunder, and the nature of the meteors that burn at night as well as the diverse images they project, what hurls the comets in the heaven, the source of the winds and the rainbow, the reason why stars fall (as the uninformed think), and other things of this type which are very pleasant to know, no matter who the teacher might be. But they cannot be learned more beautifully from any other than from Pontanus. You ask why? Because he has enveloped all things in smooth rhythms; because he frequently mentions the places of Italy and other lands that have long inspired admiration for themselves; because he has a marvelous ability to weave narrative and physical science into a knowledge of reality from which education in narration can be understood to be neither empty nor frivolous, contrary to the statements of the ignorant. To the utmost of my ability I will do my best in the explanation of all these matters, to the end that by bringing forth garlands which achieve this purpose from the works of Aristotle, Pliny, Albert the Great, Seneca, and others, I will not in setting forth Pontanus be derelict in my duty to all my students, but above all, to you.

Vienna, Austria, February 28, 1517.

Original Publication: Vadian's *Joannis Joviani Pontani, poetae divini, ad L. Franciscum Filium, Meteororum Liber*, copy found in Zentralbibliothek Zurich, G. II. 147b.

Transcription: None.

