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GOD'S PLAN FOR THE SWISS CONFEDERATION:
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OF HISTORICAL MYTH IN REFORMATION ZURICH

Hildegard Elisabeth Keller*

In the development of its political, constitutional, linguistic and confessional structures, Switzerland could be construed as representing a special case within European national history. Certainly, the Swiss have consistently seen themselves as a case apart, characterizing their nation as a “hedgehog” until well into the twentieth century. The notion that Switzerland is a hedgehog, bristling and armed to the teeth to fend off hostile neighbors, has proved crucial in times of danger, such as in the 1930’s and 1940’s. It offers more than what might – in an ironic application of François Lyotard’s term for defining foundational meta-narratives – merely be called a “grand narrative” for a small nation, however. Rather, this tradition opens up a more general topic: the genealogy of national identity. In historical terms, the consciousness that a collective might consider itself both “particular” and “distinctive” from others was originally religiously motivated. The idea that a given ethnic group had been chosen or elected by God was widespread in Antiquity, and received its canonical expression in the Old Testament covenant with Abraham, that is, with the people of Israel. As Anthony D. Smith has convincingly demonstrated, this paradigm also became foundational for many later nations’ emerging identities within a more secular modernity. Switzerland offers just such a case, not least because of its concept of a homeland (*Heimat*) closely tied to the Alpine region – an example of what Smith called an “ethnoscape.”¹

* My heartfelt thanks to Jeffrey Hamburger for his critical comments and translation of this contribution.

¹ Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): on Switzerland and its homeland tradition, cf. 155–61; for his term “ethnoscape,” 136–37; for the four aspects of this “cultural resource and sacred foundation,” 255–56. See also Clifford Longley, *Chosen People: The Big Idea that Shaped England and America* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002); Howard Brotz, *The Black Jews of Harlem. Negro Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Negro Leadership* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970). For the early-modern semantics of nation in the context of the Swiss

The first stirrings of the Reformation were unmistakably colored by Swiss conceptions of themselves as an elect people. The early decades of the sixteenth century witnessed two major challenges to the Confederation. Whereas the crushing defeat near Marignano (1515) tested the self-confidence of the confederates, who had previously viewed their legendary *Schlachtenglück* as proof that they were God's chosen people, the Reformation produced long-lasting pressures that threatened to fracture the Confederation's unity. The leaders of the Reformation explained both challenges in religious terms, demonstrating God's providence in the past toward his chosen people, and presenting themselves as restorers of a right relationship with God. Political events, they argued, manifested God's approval of or anger at the Confederation's development. The passionate, missionary zeal with which the first generation of reformers appealed to their Catholic contemporaries to return to the supposed authenticity of a mythic golden age would have been unthinkable without their first defining the Confederation in terms of a religiously charged "covenant." Just such a political appeal to spiritual orthodoxy can be found in Heinrich Bullinger's early pamphlet, *Anklag und ernstliches ermanen Gottes Allmaechtigen* (1525/1528).

After Zurich's defeat in the second war at Kappel in 1531, which ensured that the Confederation would remain a confessionally split entity, the need for new approaches became urgent. The Swiss needed models that could integrate all the Confederation's members, Catholic or Protestant, into an alliance of heterogeneous partners that reflected God's will. Randolph Head has argued that Swiss political thinkers did not intend to abolish inequality on earth, but rather sought ways to overcome it, as best as possible, through volitional structures.² Not only the first generation of Reformers, but also those who held to the older beliefs, had to learn to cope with the political challenges that the new religious situation threw up. For example, following the Reformation, the yearly renewal of the Swiss alliance became problematic, for the

confederation see Thomas Maissen, "Weshalb die Eidgenossen Helvetier wurden. Die humanistische Definition einer *natio*," in *Diffusion des Humanismus. Studien zur nationalen Geschichtsschreibung europäischer Humanisten*, eds. Johannes Helmuth, Ulrich Muhlack and Gerrit Walther (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002), 210–49.

² Randolph C. Head, "William Tell and His Comrades: Association and Fraternity in the Propaganda of Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Switzerland," *Journal of Modern History* 67, 3 (1995): 527–57, here 557. On the difference between the Confederation's model of rulership and the German Empire, see Thomas A. Brady Jr., *Turning Swiss: Cities and Empire, 1450–1550* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Catholics insisted on swearing by God, Mary and the saints, whereas the Reformed Swiss wanted to swear only by God; the divergence made any mutual oath of allegiance impossible.³ In the first two decades following the Reformation, the inhabitants of Zurich in particular needed to reflect on what form of federalism their Confederation with the other confederates, the *Eidgenossen*, should adopt. As the civic medium par excellence of the early modern period, theater not only commented on but also actively participated in this debate. No figure was more central to the production of theater in Zurich at this time than the protagonist of this paper, Jakob Ruf. His plays, especially *Wilhelm Tell*, staged and printed in Zurich in 1545, underscored how much the intensified political and cultural flux of the period required both the invention and affirmation of new models of communitarian rule, and, at the same time, a growing acceptance of inner diversity.

Heinrich Bullinger's Anklag

In the year 1525, God spoke directly to the Swiss Confederation. The twenty-one year old Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) made God's authorial voice in Zurich audible in his polemical tract *Anklag und ernstliches ermanen Gottes Allmaechtigen*.⁴ The pamphlet's rhetorical stance mirrored the reformatory zeal of Zurich's Reformers, who saw themselves as *Sprachrohr Gottes* ('God's mouthpiece'), and who envisaged the total reformation of the Confederates' territory as a precondition for remaining God's elect. The tract was written in 1525, although the first 47-page

³ Christian Sieber, "Eidleistungen und Schwörtage im spätmittelalterlichen Zürich," in *Zürich 650 Jahre eidgenössisch* (Zurich: Verlag NZZ, 2001), 19–58; William E. Rappard, *Du renouvellement des pactes confédéraux (1351–1798)* (Zurich, 1944).

⁴ *Anklag und ernstliches ermanen Gottes Allmaechtigen / zuo eyner gemeynenn Eydgnoschafft / das sy sich vonn jren Sünden / zuo jmm keere* (n.p. [Zurich], 1528). Published by Heinrich Brennwald and Heinrich Utinger, according to a handwritten note in the copy preserved in Zurich [Zentralbibliothek Zürich Zw 291]; page references according to the handwritten pagination in this copy. Hans Ulrich Bächtold graciously made available his transcription and introduction to the *Anklage*, which will appear in vol. 6 of the edition of Bullinger's works. See also his valuable study: Bächtold, "History, Ideology and Propaganda in the Reformation: the Early Writing 'Anklag und ernstliches ermanen Gottes' (1525) of Heinrich Bullinger," in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, Vol. 1: *The Medieval Inheritance*, ed. Bruce Gordon (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), 46–59; see also Fritz Büsler, "Bullinger als Prophet. Zu seiner Frühschrift *Anklag und Ermahnen*," in *Wurzeln der Reformation in Zürich*, ed. Fritz Büsler (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 106–24.

imprint appeared only in 1528, after which it was reprinted repeatedly well into the seventeenth century.⁵ Bullinger had just returned to Switzerland from the University of Cologne with a Master's degree in the liberal arts, and had taken a position as *ludimagister* at the cloister Kappel am Albis. The young Latin teacher in the cloister became a student and ideological colleague of Zurich's reformer, Ulrich Zwingli. After Zwingli's death in 1531, Bullinger governed over the Reformed church in Zurich for over four decades, from 1531 to 1575. His tract, an adhortation to the assembled confederates, conveyed a different message at the time it was composed, that is, in 1525, than at the time it was finally printed, three years later. 1525 was politically an extremely difficult year for Zurich, since its ecclesiastical reform and its rejection of mercenary service brought isolation from the Confederation. In this context, the tract came across as a justification of and polemic in favor of the Reformation. By 1528, however, several other cities (Bern, Basel, and Schaffhausen) had allied themselves with Zurich and carried out comparable Reformations. After the passage of three years, God's speech still came across as apologetic in part, but also as triumphal, owing to the missionary spirit that lasted until 1531.

Bullinger was a leading formulator of covenant theology, which was also relevant for thinking about constitutional matters. In his *Anklag*, he accentuated the motif of Jewish election for the purpose of his own critical reflection on the present. The first third of his text narrated the history of the Confederation, followed by a Reformation critique of church practices. Bullinger applied the idea of a covenant between God and his chosen people, bringing it up to date, however, as God's alliance with the Confederates. 'National' history and history of salvation thus mirrored each other. The ideological heart of the piece rested on the clever use of key terms that had political, institutional and theological meanings that intertwined political renewal with religious reform. The word *eyd* (oath), for example, referred both to the political alliance among the Confederates as well as to the baptismal covenant between God and the Confederates, with the latter one exceeding the first in relevance:⁶

⁵ Cf. Heinrich Bullinger, *Bibliographie*. Vol. 1: *Beschreibendes Verzeichnis der gedruckten Werke von Heinrich Bullinger*, ed. Joachim Staedtke (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1972), Nos. 4–8.

⁶ Fritz Büsser, *Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575): Leben, Werk und Wirkung* (Zurich: TVZ Theologischer Verlag, 2004), 35, 40–41. This idea is also elaborated in Bullinger's

Lieben Eydgrossen gedenckend yetz / das jr üch mir in dem Touff mit sterckerem Eyd verbunden habend / dann jr vnder einanderen / ein Ort dem anderen verbundenn sye. Der Eyd / das jr mich wellind für üweren eynigen Gott halten / fürtriff all brüch / sitten vnnd lange gezyten. Deß erman ich üch yetzund.

(Dear confederates, bear in mind that in baptism you have bound yourself to me with a stronger oath than that which you binds you among yourselves in one place to another. The oath that you wish to recognize me as your only God supersedes all customs, practices and traditions. Of this I sternly remind you now.)⁷

The *Anklag* also reflected Bullinger's understanding of the covenant in its rhetorical structure: the whole text – written by a twenty-two year old theologian trained in rhetoric who assumed an authorial gesture of prophecy – consisted a fervently accusatory speech by God.⁸ The relevant rhetorical figure was thus that of *prosopopeia*, as confirmed by the marginalia in the printed edition (See figures 1 and 2) and by an entry in Bullinger's *Diarium: Germanica illa prosopopeia Dei*.⁹ The trope of *prosopopeia*, which belongs to allegory, lends a message a 'face' (in Greek, *prósōpon* 'face, visage') by making use of a dramatic speaking figure.¹⁰ God's gesture of showing or averting his face, which in the five Books of Moses reveals a religious state of grace or lack thereof, confronted the reading or listening public in the most direct manner, before their very eyes (in Greek, *prós-* and *ōps* 'eye'), with the presence of God. In Bullinger's case, he wanted the members of the Confederation to feel that they were under observation, and to recognize how God judged their present actions. God's keen vision penetrated space (the Alpine

play *Lucrezia und Brutus*; Emidio Campi, "Bullinger's Early Political and Theological Thought: Brutus Tigurinus," in *Architect of Reformation. An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504–1575*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2004), 181–99; Rémy Charbon, "Lucretia Tigurina: Heinrich Bullingers Spiel von Lucretia und Brutus (1526)," in *Antiquitates Renatae. Deutsche und französische Beiträge zur Wirkung der Antike in der europäischen Literatur*, ed. Verena Ehrlich-Häfelí et al. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1998), 35–47.

⁷ Bullinger, *Anklag*, 33.

⁸ Büsler, "Bullinger als Prophet," 116 (Bullinger "spielt den Propheten").

⁹ *Heinrich Bullingers Diarium (Annales vitae) der Jahre 1504–1574*, ed. Emil Egli (Basel, 1904), 12. For an overview to the interplay between Swiss humanism and Reformation see Thomas Maissen, "Literaturbericht Schweizer Humanismus," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 50 (2000), 515–44.

¹⁰ For the description, see Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik: Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Hueber, 1960), 411–13, §§ 826–929.

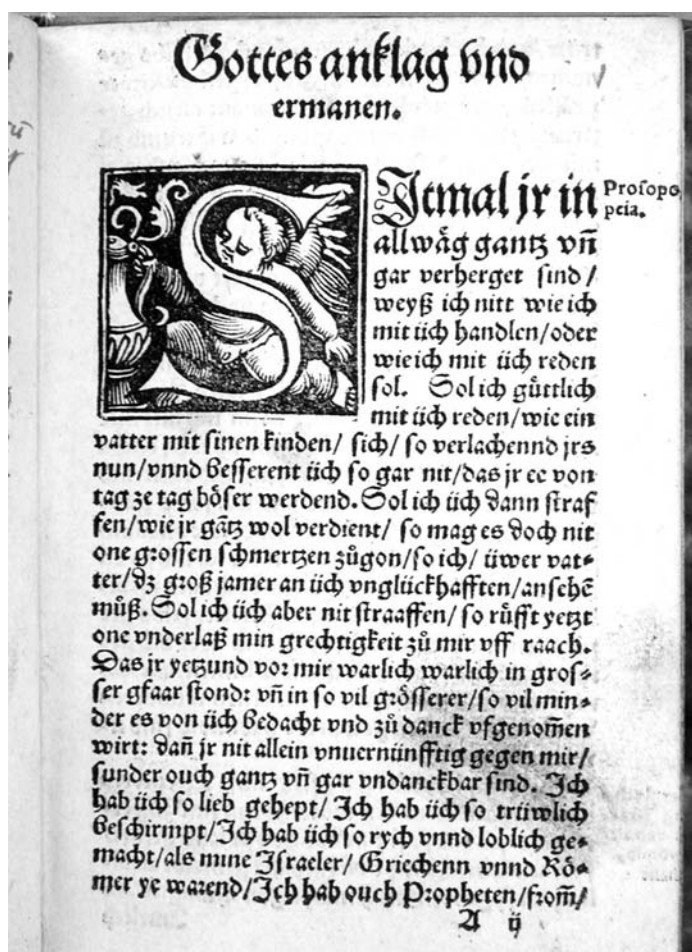


Figure 1: Marginalia in the 1528 print of Bullinger's *Anklag* (fol. A2r).
Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, Zw 291.



Figure 2: Marginalia in detail (fol. A2r). Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, Zw 291.

landscape) and time (the history of the Confederation). In a manner anticipating tourism, God in the *Anklag* described the Alps in detail as the homeland of the confederates. He praised the fertile hills with their vineyards and meadows, in which cows and oxen trotted in grass reaching their bellies, and he evoked the fresh air, the many lakes rich with fish, and the many rivers that, together with the natural mountain ring-wall, made Switzerland a well-protected paradise.¹¹ The Confederation, in Bullinger's recounting, was guarded by natural barriers and cleverly organized by God to permit more than just a harsh subsistence.

For Bullinger, this topography represented more than a fortunate natural resource. Rather, it proved that the Creator of the world was the architect of the Confederation's political arrangements as well. With its thirteen members, the alliance therefore appeared to him as a special sort of protectorate. In this context, the theology of the covenant and constitutional concepts of alliance and freedom came together in the right to resist tyranny and oligarchy – an allusion to William Tell's murder of the tyrannical bailiff, whom Bullinger called Gryßler.¹² Bullinger also evoked the humble "fathers" (*vaetteren*), the initial founders of the Confederation. With God's help, they struggled to achieve their *Democratia* and their *Commun* against aristocratic tyrants; they cultivated an ethos of work with an unpretentious attitude, and knew nothing of "golden rings and chains" or of "silk and French couture" – code words for a fancy, foreign lifestyle. A cascade of virtuous adjectives in the text characterized the widely known generosity of the 'old confederates.'¹³

The political and religious message of the pamphlet was therefore as unmistakable as its title. A speaking God was reproaching his "beloved sons" for their behavior, noting especially that the ruling class, indifferent to the common good, had reintroduced tyranny and slavery, thus betraying their community and their fellow citizens for blood money. Even worse, they had fallen into idolatry. The divine voice therefore demanded that the Swiss immediately return to the honorable ways ("*eerberen laeben*") of their forefathers, that they adopt a reform of the faith based on the Word of God and – in remarkably harsh words – that they renounce the all-too-dirty income that they received for providing

¹¹ Bullinger, *Anklag*, 39–40.

¹² Gryßler was also the name used in Petermann Etterlin's *Kronica* (1507), the first extensive history of the Confederation Bullinger alludes several times to this mythic key event. Cf. Bullinger, *Anklag*, 2–5.

¹³ Bullinger, *Anklag*, 40.

Swiss mercenaries to the French monarch and to other rulers.¹⁴ Fulfilling these demands – which unmistakably reflected the genuine aspirations of Zurich's Reformers – would strengthen the political unity of the whole Confederation and help it achieve more respect beyond its borders than even the forefathers had garnered. The speech did not recognize any other way to fulfill this aim: “By such means the Confederation will once again become one – and otherwise by no way whatsoever.”¹⁵

God spoke as a military commander when he turned his analytical eye to the results of the confederate wars of liberation. This God had always been alongside, indeed, right in the midst of the confederates as they fought their battles, not only the glorious victories at Morgarten and Sempach, but also the disastrous defeats during the *Alte Zürichkrieg* or at Marignano. In the *Anklag*, God declared himself the commander of all Swiss commanders, and described himself as their captain, their *hauptmann*.¹⁶ Bullinger incorporated the miracle of success against all odds into his reminiscences, calculating the number of the living and the dead who fell in battle. The “little trooplet” (“*kley n hüfflin*”) of Confederates had defeated extremely powerful enemies, with God's help, time and again, and had brought home a great number of captured banners and large quantities of spoils.

When it came to the bloody defeats of the Confederates, the divine speaker simply mentioned their injuries and their shame. Who was behind all this, asks the *Anklag*. Bullinger's speaker clearly sought to impress on his listeners that at Marignano and elsewhere, he had been the one who inflicted these disasters and defeats, ordaining the death of their leaders in order to take revenge on the sinning Confederates

wüssend jr noch nit waer üch den grossen schaden / vnnnd das erbermcklich
leyd zuostattet? Jch habs gethon / jch / jch üwer Herr vnd grusamer
Gott: vnd hab damit üwer sünd / hassz / verbunst / pensionen / gaellt /
gyt / vnd hochmuot schwarlich vnd ruch heymgesuocht.¹⁷

(Are you not yet aware who brought about these incalculable damages and pitiful suffering? I have done it, I, I, your Lord and vengeful God, for I have punished you severely for your sins, your hate, your service as mercenaries, your avarice and pride.)

¹⁴ Bullinger, *Anklag*, 43.

¹⁵ “Dardurch wirt ouch ein Eydgnoschafft widerumb in cynigkeyit kummen / vnd sust in keinen andern waeg.” Bullinger, *Anklag*, 40.

¹⁶ Bullinger, *Anklag*, 7.

¹⁷ Bullinger, *Anklag*, 46.

Bullinger's *prosopopeia Dei* thus represented a God who spoke powerfully to Zurich's citizens and to all confederates, at times beneficent, at times vengeful and angrily threatening like the God of the Old Testament. Throughout the text, he reminded his listeners of his historical relationship with his chosen peoples, connecting Jewish and a few Roman references seamlessly with political events from the history of the Confederation. The *Anklag* ended with a furious and apocalyptic threat of punishment, in keeping with the *ius talionis*: the accuser threatened "jch wil  ch gentzlich mit der maa  messen / wie jr ander l ten messend" ("I will measure by the same scale you have used to measure others") and prophesized that he would once again subjugate them under lords, "die sy bi  vff das beyn gnagind" (lit. "who will gnaw them right down to the bone.")¹⁸ The same formula appeared again in the opening scene of Ruf's play, *Wilhelm Tell*.

The myth of a chosen people and its fathers

As Bullinger's text reveals, the biblical topos of the "promised land in which milk and honey flow" could be projected onto the alpine topography with its meadows, cows and shepherds. Such projections legitimized the unity of a fateful sliver of the earth, called on by God to overthrow foreign tyranny through a confederate covenant that launched the bloody struggle for freedom and a republican order. That, in a nutshell, was the ideological heart of Bullinger's historiography in the *Anklag*. Bullinger's "I" spoke to the confederates like a ventriloquist of the God found in the Books of Moses.¹⁹ The analogy was intentional: here as elsewhere, Bullinger provided a visual signal to the reader in a marginal note saying "comparison between Israel and the Confederation" (See figure 3). Two comparably constructed sections concentrated on the "wonders" that God had carried out on behalf of the people of Israel, and twice a single sentence argued that as far Bullinger was concerned, the wonders worked by God on behalf of the Swiss were no less extraordinary than those found in Jewish history. God's love for the Confederation, which in Bullinger's text even exceeded that for Israel, became visible through a series of step-by-step analogies

¹⁸ Bullinger, *Anklag*, 46.

¹⁹ Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev. 20:24.

jr mir also widersträbind/ ja mir/ der ich üch so vil
 güte gethon hab. Dann gange doch eins vß als
 len minen vólcken/ ouch mine Israeler selbs her
 für/ denen ich das gethon/ das ich aber üch ge-
 thon hab: vnd sagend doch alle Element/ alle Kü-
 nigrych vnd menschen/ vonn denen wunderen
 die ich mit Israelen gewürct hab: noch sind üs
 were nit minder.

erglych
 ng Israe
 s vnd der
 ydgnos
 hafft

Israelem hab ich vß d' gfenctnuß Egypti ero-
 lößt/ Pharaonem den wüterich mit sinē züg ero-
 trenct: ich hab sy fry in das gelopt land gefürt/
 sy darinn beschirmt vñ sigafft gemacht an al-
 len iren sygenden/ ouch mächtigen Königen/ am
 Zimelech

Figure 3: Marginalia with the comparison between Israel and the Confederation in the 1528 print of Bullinger's *Anklag* (fol.). Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, Zw 291.

between Jewish and Swiss history.²⁰ As Bullinger's God affirmed: "not less [than for the Jews] have I done through you" ("Nit minders hab ich mit üch verwürckt").²¹

The vision of a Swiss Confederation chosen by God was not original to Bullinger.²² It was much older and served, in narrative form, as an ideological engine both before and after the mercenary activities that had, depending on one's perspective, made the Confederation famous or infamous.²³ The motif of the struggle for freedom, which constituted the most important link to Old Testament self-projections, belonged as much to humanist rhetorical praise of the Confederation as to chronicles and battle songs.²⁴ Chronicles were the first written sources to celebrate Swiss success in war in terms of the history of salvation. In the early fourteenth century, for example, Johannes von Winterthur (1302–1348) reported on the battle of Morgarten, interpreting the victory of the confederates against their 'tyrannical' lords in terms of the Old Testament's salvational history, and literally adapting quotations from the Book of Judith 4 to the history of the confederates.²⁵ Battle songs emerged during the second half of the fifteenth century. Several songs by Mathis Zollner (d. 1507/8) expressed the self-confidence of the elect, of which his *Lied über die Schlacht bei Murten* offers perhaps the best and most relevant example. Zollner celebrated the Confederation's victory over Charles the Bold as evidence of divine election by drawing precise parallels with various liberational battles in the Old Testament.²⁶

²⁰ Cf. Bullinger, *Anklag*, 2–6.

²¹ Bullinger, *Anklag*, 2–3.

²² Ruf's reference to the election of the Eidgenossen finds parallels across Europe, e.g., in late fifteenth-century Florence, one of many locations where the theme of election resonated with the *res publica*; see Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence, 1494–1545* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

²³ Cf. Bächtold, "History, Ideology and Propaganda in the Reformation," 49–51.

²⁴ E.g. Heinrich Glarean's *Helvetiae Descriptio* of 1514/1515. See Franz-Dieter Sauerborn, "Die Krönung des schweizerischen Humanisten Glarean zum *poeta laureatus* durch Kaiser Maximilian I. im Jahre 1512 und seine *Helvetiae Descriptio* von 1514/1515," *Zeitschrift des Breisgau-Geschichtsvereins "Schau-ins-Land"* 116 (1997): 157–92.

²⁵ Friedrich Baethgen and C. Brun, eds., *Die Chronik Johans von Winterthur* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1924), 78; cf. Friedrich Baethgen, "Zu Johannes von Winterthurs Bericht über die Schlacht am Morgarten," *Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Geschichte* 3 (1923): 106–10.

²⁶ *Die historischen Volkslieder der Deutschen vom 13. bis 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. R. v. Liliencron (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1869), 99–102 (No. 144). For Zollner's work, see Frieder Schanze's discussion in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon* (Berlin and New

Zollner's song included material drawn from Joshua's liberation of the besieged Gibeon (Joshua 10); he also saw the Confederates' victory against the Burgundian troops who were drowned in the Lake of Murten as an echo of the destruction of Pharaoh in the Red Sea.²⁷ Bullinger, who also made this comparison, must have been well acquainted with these chronicles und songs, which shared his tendency to articulate praise of nature and of the Alps, and to combine it with an archaic anthropology of Alpine inhabitants.

Such specific quasi-Jewish myths of liberation and foundation of the Confederation entered into theological pamphlets only in Reformed Zurich. Jakob Ruf's plays in the same city marked the first time that it entered explicitly into a work of theater. Focusing this ideological model specifically on the history of the city of Zurich may well be Bullinger's original contribution: in the *Anklag*, he introduced the analogy between the two elect peoples by describing the freeing of the people of Israel from their bondage in Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh's forces in the Red Sea. According to Bullinger, this biblical history of resistance corresponded to Zurich's defeat of the lords of Regensberg – right up to and including their subjugation, as he noted derisively in the *Anklag*. This success, only one of the many Confederate victories that he mentioned, fit perfectly with the Reformers' prophetic self-image of the city of Zurich as having been called by God.²⁸ That was the context within which Bullinger's adaptation of the myth fulfilled its function. We can further differentiate this process, and prepare for an interpretation of Ruf's plays, by using a concept developed by Jan Assmann.

According to Assmann, the myth describing the people of Israel as God's chosen belongs to a larger group of myths that deal with dominion and with overcoming tyrannical rulers.²⁹ His reflections help characterize such myths' function for collective processes of self-discovery, since "societies shift under the spell of foundational histories,

York: Walter de Gruyter & Co. 1977–), 10: 1583–1586. For the song of the battle at Murten, see Hellmut Thomke, "Der se der ward von bluote rot: Die Burgunderkriege im Spiegel der Dichtung," *Berner Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Heimatkunde* 38 (1976): 1–40, esp. 14–17.

²⁷ In stanzas 10–11.

²⁸ This point of view is touched on lightly here, but is presented more forcefully in his later historical work, the *Tigurinerchronik*. An edition is planned by Hans Ulrich Bächtold.

²⁹ Jan Assmann, "Frühe Formen politischer Mythomotorik: Fundierende, kontra-präsentische und revolutionäre Mythen," in *Revolution und Mythos* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), 39–61.

from which they draw their identity and a sense of continuity and on the basis of which they base their knowledge of unity and distinctive character.”³⁰ In Assmann’s view, it was essential that its textual transmission through the Torah gave the myth of the Israelites as God’s chosen people a mobilizing function, be it progressive or conservative, with regard to Jewish interpretations of their society’s present or future development. The resulting formative dynamic Assmann calls *Mythomotorik* (which might be translated as “the dynamics of myth”).³¹ One aspect emphasized by Assmann is undoubtedly of special importance for the consideration of the performing arts as practiced by the citizenry of Zurich: in order for such kinetic, collective energy to become effective, history not only has to be self-consciously “known,” but also “inhabited.”³² Following Assmann, we can designate the Swiss myths described here as foundational in so far as their mobilizing effect made possible both self-determination and the overcoming of foreign rule. The foundational myths of the Confederation, however, at least as recontextualized in early sixteenth-century pamphlets and theatre, undoubtedly served another function, also defined by Assmann: they provided a critical “counter-presence.” In this function, the mythical, idealized past serves as a platform for criticism of a present that is perceived to be deficient.³³ To this extent, Bullinger’s *Anklag* was a particularly revealing document that made the collective concept of the *alt eydgnossen* or *vaetter* the backbone of its fight for the Reformation. Bullinger’s vision allowed no doubt about Zurich’s (and all reformers’) special place in God’s plan of salvation.

The fathers on Zurich’s stage

In Bullinger’s and Ruf’s Zurich, the idealized heroic age was conjured up in the form of the aforementioned *vaetter*, the old, pious confederates. The first decades of the sixteenth century witnessed the rediscovery of

³⁰ Assmann, “Frühe Formen,” 40.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Assmann, “Frühe Formen,” 47.

³³ “In ihrer ‘kontrapräsentischen Funktion’ [...] geht Mythomotorik von Defizienzerfahrungen aus und beschwört in der Erinnerung eine Vergangenheit, die meist die Züge eines Heroischen Zeitalters annimmt. Von diesen Erzählungen her fällt ein ganz anderes Licht auf die Gegenwart: es hebt das Fehlende, Verschwundene, Verlorene, an den Rand Gedrängte hervor und macht den Bruch bewusst zwischen ‘einst’ und ‘jetzt.’” Assmann, “Frühe Formen,” 52.

these mythical figures on the stage in two works: first, the anonymous *Urner Tellenspiel* (1512, probably performed in Altdorf);³⁴ and second, *Das Spiel von den alten und jungen Eidgenossen*, staged in Zurich at New Years, 1514, by Balthasar Spross. Spross's play is transmitted only in a manuscript that is appended, without any graphic mark of separation, immediately before the manuscript of Jakob Ruf's *Etter Heini*.³⁵ Spross's play, viewed by Randolph Head as "the most important text in the Swiss debate about the nature of 'true' nobility," depicts events in Act V concerning the mythical fathers that confirm this analysis.³⁶ Rusticity and simplicity like that displayed by these fathers was often a target of ridicule, but Spross legitimized them, at a different level, in terms of the history of salvation.³⁷ The leading reforming circles of Zurich industriously sought to affiliate themselves with the charismatic *vaettern* – an effort that took on scholarly dimensions in the case of Bullinger, whose involvement with the Church Fathers testifies to this.³⁸

The myth of the Helvetic fathers, set in the three forest cantons (which remained Catholic), acquired a different function in Zurich in the years following the city's defeat at Kappel. The situation had changed, confessional defamation was forbidden, and the reality of a bi-confessional Confederation had to be accepted, more or less soberly, by the leaders and citizens of Zurich. The building blocks of Confederate historiography, the authentic lives and beliefs that the Reformers in Zurich had claimed as their own, now had to be reinterpreted and applied to all the Confederates in order to invigorate the fragile fabric of the alliance. As a result, although Zurich did not abandon the foundational myth of the elect fathers, it brought the myth up-to-date on the stage two decades after the Reformation. This task was assumed by Jakob Ruf, who came to Zurich as an adult in 1532. Although he

³⁴ Max Wehrli, ed., *Das Lied von der Entstehung der Eidgenossenschaft: Das Urner Tellenspiel*, (Aarau: Sauerländer, 1952); Martin W. Walsh, "The *Urner Tellenspiel* of 1512: Strategies of Early Political Drama," *Comparative Drama* 34 (2000): 155–73.

³⁵ The manuscript is housed in the Zentralbibliothek Zürich (Ms. A 151). *Das Spiel von den alten und jungen Eidgenossen*, ed. Friederike Christ-Kutter (Bern: Francke, 1963).

³⁶ Head, "William Tell," 537; see also Christ-Kutter's introduction, 27.

³⁷ *Das Spiel von den alten und jungen Eidgenossen*, lines 535–44.

³⁸ Bullinger had read the Church Fathers toward the end of his period of study in Cologne, partly in the newly printed editions of Erasmus of Rotterdam, partly in the well appointed library of the Dominicans. Silke-Petra Bergjan, "Bullinger und die griechischen Kirchenväter in der konfessionellen Auseinandersetzung," in *Heinrich Bullinger und seine Zeit: Eine Vorlesungsreihe*, ed. Emidio Campi (Zurich: TVZ Theologischer Verlag, 2004), 133–59; Alfred Schindler, "Bullinger und die lateinischen Kirchenväter," *ibid.*, 161–77; see also Fritz Büsser, "Bullinger als Prophet," 12–26.

had not been born a member of the Confederation, he became a vocal and persuasive champion of its values. Before considering Ruf's role, however, another set of questions must first be addressed, namely, what function did theater perform in early modern cities, and why did authors resort to it?

To say that urban performances were one of the mass media of the early modern era does not convey the full range of their implications. They belonged to the symbolic forms of communication that allowed the population of a city – not yet bound together by a sense of community based on modern administrative, educational and cultural institutions – to form its own understanding of itself. In the sixteenth century, civic productions served as “political propaganda and instruments of struggle in actual situations of conflict” as well as providing an overwhelmingly republican didactic theater.³⁹ This proved to be especially true for contemporary theater in Zurich, but also applied other Swiss towns, such as Bern, Basel and Lucerne. Performers and public alike drew on dramatic stagings to come to an understanding of themselves as citizens of a city-state within an Empire, as allies within a Confederation, and as avant-garde reformers of ecclesiastical, social and civic institutions. Plays in these towns enacted the community's own history, staged in a way that allowed the critical larger alliance among the Confederates, which by definition was heterogeneous in character (constituted, as it was, by religiously and politically divergent partners), to recognize and represent a shared identity.⁴⁰ Research on the history of early modern Swiss theater, however, has not yet fully come to terms with the many ways that these productions projected salvational history, universal history and civic law into their compelling narratives of the foundation of the Confederation. Ruf's *Wilhelm Tell* may serve here as an adequate point of departure for such a discussion.

³⁹ Christel Meier, “Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Werte im vormodernen Theater: Eine Einführung,” in *Das Theater des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit als Ort und Medium sozialer und symbolischer Kommunikation*, eds. Christel Meier et al. (Münster: Rhema, 2004), 7–22, here 16.

⁴⁰ Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, “Zeremoniell, Ritual, Symbol. Neue Forschungen zur symbolischen Kommunikation in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit,” *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 27, 1 (2000): 389–405; Glenn Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community in Reformation Bern, 1523–1555* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Silvia Seraina Tschopp, “Reformationsdrama,” in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2003, 247–249; Meier, “Einführung.”

Jakob Ruf's plays for the Confederation

Jakob Ruf was born in Constance around 1505 as the eldest son in a rather poor family.⁴¹ His theatrical and medical work has largely been overlooked by twentieth-century scholarship on those fields.⁴² After several years of monastic education, he left the monastery, became an apprentice to a barber and, later on, earned the title of a master of surgery. He came to Zurich in 1532, right after the second war of Kappel, during which the city surgeon Jakob Sprenger fell, and was appointed as the new *chirurgus tigurinus*. In the same year, he received citizenship. Ruf, a remarkable social climber, continued a successful career within Zurich's hierarchy of medical offices. He died in the city in 1558, respected as a well-known authority who had bridged theory and practice in surgery and ophthalmology as well as in the training of Zurich's midwives. He was equally notable for his commitment to urban theater: from the late 1530's until 1550, he was Zurich's most visible playwright, staging four of his five plays in the Münsterhof, one of the main places in town. All five have come down to us either as manuscripts, (one of them richly illustrated), or as contemporary imprints from the publishers Christoph Froschauer and Augustin Fries.⁴³

Ruf acquired considerable authority as city surgeon and briefly as town physician – a post he held for two years until the university-trained doctor Konrad Gessner (1516–1565) was appointed to it.⁴⁴ In his theatrical works, he represented himself with the authority of the *chirurgus tigurinus*. The title pages of two plays, the *Passion* and the *Wilhelm Tell*,

⁴¹ For Jakob Ruf's biography, newly reconstructed on the basis of archival research, see Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, ed., *Jakob Ruf: Leben, Werk Und Studein* (Zurich: NZZ Libro, 2008), 27–157.

⁴² Cf. Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, "Einleitung," in Keller, ed., *Jakob Ruf*, 1:11–25. Ruf's complete works are edited for the first time according to scholarly standards in this series. All quotations from Ruf's texts in this paper are cited from volume 1 without further reference, and with their orthography standardized (e.g., all superscripts are transformed into modern umlauts).

⁴³ His works, in addition to the plays and medical texts in German and Latin, also include broadsheets on heavenly apparitions and monstrous births, calendars, political songs and prognostic texts. See the list in Keller, ed., *Jakob Ruf*, 1:161–67.

⁴⁴ The most important document for Ruf's career and his appointment as the town physician (which was uncommon for a person without a university degree) is the so-called *Bestallungsurkunde*, published in Keller, ed., *Jakob Ruf*, 1:259–62, and as an audio-version on a CD-ROM contained in the book.

portray his coat of arms (See figure 4), adorned by a banderole with the inscription “IACOB RVEF STEINSCHNIDER. ZVRI” (“Jakob Ruf, lithotomist, Zurich,” i.e., one skilled in performing the operation of removing stones from the bladder). Below the coat of arms, a Latin inscription signaled the author’s scholarly background: “PER IACOBVM RVEF, urbis Tigurinæ Chirurgum.”

Ruf’s interest in visual representation through the “wonderwork of the eye,” as he called it in his Latin treatise *Practica copiosa de arte ophthalmica* (ca. 1545), was manifested no less in the theoretical interests he expressed as an author than in his practical activities as a surgeon (See figure 5).⁴⁵ Removing cataracts and restoring his patients’ sight, he dealt with the eye as a key organ for bodily perception. His differentiated interest in visualization – a particularly intriguing issue after the iconoclasm of the Reformation had swept away the sumptuousness of visible images in Zurich – also found expression in the prologue to his passion play *Das byden vnsers Herren Jesu Christi* (1545). There, he argued that the life of Christ had to be impressed on the mind’s eye of the audience if it was to have a lasting effect. *Vor Augen führen* (“to make things visible to the eyes”) represented a central motif in this as well as in his other plays.⁴⁶ The *tableaux vivants* that he organized on stage, consisting of figures from the Bible or from the history of the Swiss, were not intended to become cult objects, however. Rather, Ruf thought that the *tabula rasa* in Zurich’s churches and public places should once again be filled with pictures, both negative and positive, that provided exemplary figures as models of action and behavior for the citizens. Ruf’s understanding of vision explains the seeming paradox of a Protestant playwright who confronted his viewers with God on stage, as Ruf did, for example, in his play *Adam und Eva* (1550). Ruf’s dramas, no less than Bullinger’s early tract, aimed to convince Zurich’s citizens that their God was always present as a passionate observer of their deeds. Ruf’s focus, however, differed importantly from Bullinger’s. The younger playwright’s work

⁴⁵ The *Practica* has never been printed. It is conserved in a single manuscript, richly illustrated with drawings in ink: Sammlungen der medizinische Universität Wien, JB 6.452. It is edited by Hubert Steinke and Clemens Müller in Keller, ed., *Jakob Ruf*, 3:465–599.

⁴⁶ For that purpose, the passion play uses rhetorical trope of *prosopopeia* in a theological context as well, namely in the opening speech of the herald on the second day (verses 2274–2299). A new edition of the play by Seline Schellenberg Wessendorf is published in Keller, ed., *Jakob Ruf*, 3:229–461.



Figure 4: Jakob Ruf's coat of arms from the title-page of his *Wilhelm Tell*, 1545, identical with the colored one on the title-page of his *Passion*, 1545
Photo: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Rar. 76.

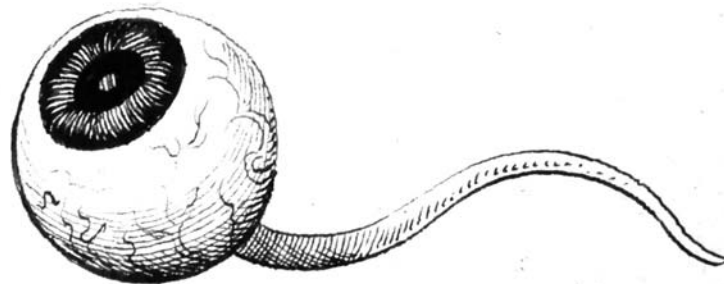


Figure 5: Pen-drawing from Jakob Ruf's *Practica copiosa de arte ophthalmica*, ca. 1545 (fol. 13v). Photo: Sammlungen der medizinische Universität Wien.

taught Zurich's citizens to see themselves as part of a larger unity, one that could encompass Switzerland's confessional differences, thus ensuring the freedom of the Reformed Confederates in particular. The former inhabitant of Constance knew just how precious such political unity was, especially in the difficult years when his native city faced re-Catholicization and those who wished to remain Reformed had to go into exile to Switzerland.⁴⁷

Ruf's play *Wilhelm Tell*, staged as an open-air performance involving an impressively large number of citizens in 1545, and printed in the same year in Zurich, belonged to the wave of popularization of William Tell and his comrades, those founding fathers of the Confederation so admired by Zurich's reformers.⁴⁸ The narrative around William Tell became especially popular in the 1530's and 1540's, and not only in Zurich.⁴⁹ The myth belonged to secular historiography as much as to salvation history, insofar as it revealed God's plan for the 'small people' in the Alps and for their political self-determination. No other play illustrated these connections better than Ruf's *Wilhelm Tell*, and no part of his play demonstrates this point more effectively than the speeches of the heralds at its beginning.

⁴⁷ Andrea Kauer and Seline Schellenberg Wessendorf, "Jakob Rufs soziale Netze in Zürich und Konstanz," in Keller, ed., *Jakob Ruf*, 1:130–41.

⁴⁸ The play is edited by Andrea Kauer and published in Keller, ed., *Jakob Ruf*, 3:121–225.

⁴⁹ The presence of this liberation-myth can be richly documented in media addressed to various audiences, ranging from carved tablets, dagger sheaths, and glass panes to printed calendars; cf. Walter Dettwiler, *Wilhelm Tell: Ansichten und Absichten* (Zurich: Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, 1991).

Ruf opened the play with two heralds (*erst Herold, der jung herold*), representing two different generations. They performed the typical herald's function of accompanying the public audience into the world of the play, but the length of their speeches far exceeded what was customary in dramas of this period. Moreover, their role was not limited to framing the fictional reality of the drama. Rather – and this is the decisive point – their principal purpose was to offer learned lessons in history that appealed to the spectators to identify themselves as Confederates, as *Eidgenossen*, and not just as Reformed citizens of Zurich. In 146 verses, the first herald presented a version of salvation history based on the canonical four world empires. He explained their rise and fall, and emphasized that in each case, their degeneration made necessary a transition of power to the next.⁵⁰ In the following 141 verses, the second herald took up the ethnogenesis of the Alpine peoples by conflating secular Roman historiography with the originary myth of the Confederation. His speech culminated in his declaration that the freedom of the confederates had been granted from the very beginning.

As printed by the Zurich publisher Augustin Fries, the play manifested two other significant features. First, the printed edition made all the decisive scenes of the Confederates' struggle for liberation visible in the form of woodcut illustrations, thus offering further insights into Ruf's dramaturgy of the heralds. The first two woodcuts of the edition showed the heralds, with the second visualizing the moment when the shield was handed over to the child herald (See figure 6). On this shield, the griffin from Ruf's family coat of arms appeared (See figure 4, above). At the very least, the printed play suggested that Ruf associated his own name with the authority that he invested in *Wilhelm Tell*. The heralds' speeches were thus paratexts in the classical sense – a means of shaping reception and, in this case, an aid to understanding the performance as a history of origins. The heralds themselves embodied the voice of the Lord, which on the stage of Jakob Ruf was connected with the voice of the author.⁵¹ Moreover, in addition to the illustrations, the printed edition commented on the heralds' speeches with marginal glosses. For the first herald, the glosses provided the relevant scriptural sources and Latin references to the four empires;

⁵⁰ Christian Moser, "Weltalter – Weltreiche," in Keller, ed., *Jakob Ruf*, 1:241–43.

⁵¹ Otto Koischwitz, *Der Theaterherold im deutschen Schauspiel des Mittelalters und der Reformationszeit* (Berlin: Emil Ebering, 1926).

**Verz gibt der Herold dem jungē Kna
ben den schilt / laßt in den nachgen
den spruch auch sagen.**



**Der jung Herold ist ein junger
Knab/ spricht das Argument.**

Figure 6: Transmission of the shield of the heralds on a woodcut in Jakob Ruf's *Wilhelm Tell*, 1545 (fol. A2r). Photo: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Rar. 76.

for the second, younger herald, they supported Ruf's historiographical discourse with chronological indications. These glosses thus not only provided visual links with the printed historical and theological works of the period, as had also been the case with Bullinger's treatise, but they also transformed the play, following its public performance, into a printed book of history and a richly illustrated historical commentary for the inhabitants of the city.

An analysis of the text reveals how Ruf reworked his models for *Wilhelm Tell*. The play emotionalized the theatrical representation of the myth of liberation in various ways, including elaborations of familiar scenes and additions of new elements to the action. Like the *Urner Tellenspiel*, Ruf's play opened with a speech by the bailiff Gryßler. In keeping with the woodcut illustration inserted in the printed edition, Gryßler on horseback spoke to the Confederates standing before him in their assembly ("an der Tagsatzung"), announcing his assumption of power (See figure 7). Ruf supplemented his models here by adding numerous threatening undertones. Since these harked back to Gryßler's opening address ("jr lieben fründ," i.e. "my dear friends"), they sounded like mockery in their denial of Swiss liberty.⁵² It would have been obvious to the audience that this new ruler sought to enslave the peasant population of central Switzerland, to terminate their existing freedom, and to make them fear his sovereignty. Gryßler declared that his Austrian nobility legitimized his power, but from the perspective of the Confederates who appeared after him to portray his impact on their land, his claims to rulership were illegitimate. The negative introduction of the bailiff thus laid the groundwork for the later justification of his assassination.⁵³ When the complaints of the peasants concerning the predations of the bailiff increased – an addition that Ruf inserted in order to heighten the atmosphere of anxiety – and when Tell finally fell into the clutches of the bailiff, the drama accelerated.

⁵² In Ruf's model, the bailiff had addressed the confederates as "jr buren alle sampt." Cf. *Urner Tellenspiel*, ed. Wehrli, verses 125–36. The two protagonists of the play, the bailiff and Tell, are joined by the discourse of Swiss liberation, which takes material shape (especially in its aspects of mockery and denial) in the bailiff's hat and the "hat of Tell" (*Tellenhut*); cf. Thomas Maissen, "Der Freiheitshut. Ikonografische Annäherungen an das republikanische Freiheitsverständnis in der frühneuzeitlichen Eidgenossenschaft" in *Kollektive Freiheitsvorstellungen im frühneuzeitlichen Europa (1400–1850)*, eds. Georg Schmidt, Martin van Gelderen and Christopher Snigula (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006) 191–222.

⁵³ Guy P. Marchal, "Die Antwort der Bauern: Elemente und Schichtungen des eidgenössischen Geschichtsbewusstseins am Ausgang des Mittelalters," in *Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbewusstsein im späten Mittelalter*, ed. Hans Patze (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1987), 757–90.

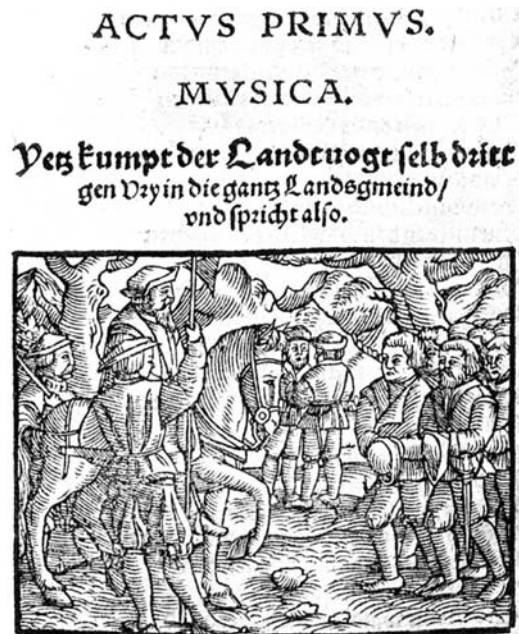


Figure 7: The bailiff speaks to the confederates; woodcut in Jakob Ruf's *Wilhelm Tell*, 1545 (fol. A7r). Photo: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Rar. 76.

Tell derived his right of resistance from the discrepancy between the bailiff's claims to authority and his actual conduct. In shooting the bailiff from his ambush, therefore, Tell murdered a tyrant. Ruf was the first author to truly dramatize this critical scene.⁵⁴ As Gryßler's corpse was dragged away, his murderer praised God in a monologue resembling a prayer for having helped him to vanquish a tyrant and to free himself as well as his people from their tormentor. Tell's prayer emphasized the collective political significance of his deed for the Confederation, and thus let him appear, in his role as a murderer of a tyrant, as an instrument of God:

⁵⁴ Cf. *Urner Tellenspiel*, ed. Wehrli; following verse 376 an extensive set of instructions for performance appear, which provide information about the murder. All further speeches by the characters, including Tell's monologue after the act, are missing.

Gott sy gelobt in dewigkeit
 Das er vns hat in sonderheit
 Erlöbt von der bezwungenschafft
 Ein fromme lobliche Eydgnoschafft

(May God be praised in eternity,
 for he has specially chosen us,
 a virtuous, praiseworthy Confederation,
 for liberation from oppression.)

The young herald at the opening of the play had already announced that this outcome represented God's will for the Confederation:

Biß Gott nit mee wolt han verguot
 Der tampt vnd milteret jren pracht
 Das er gantz ward zenüti gmacht
 Mit siner raach zuo sinen stunden
 All wüetrich vnd jrsglychen kunden
 Biß vßgrüt ward jr gschlächt vnd stamm
 Vnd keiner nit ins land mee kam.

(God did not want to tolerate [the unjust rulers], so he reduced and diminished their glory, so that it was entirely destroyed; with His judgment at His time, he annihilated all such villains and their followers, their kin and their lines, so that none came into this country any more.)

Tell's triumphant celebration of the Confederation allows us to consider once again how he recontextualized the myth of its sacred election.

Remarkably, Ruf's prologue to *Wilhelm Tell*, like that to his 1538 *Etter Heini*, stressed neither the special status of the citizens of Zurich nor that of its reformers, but rather the union between peers within the Confederation, and eventually among all Christians. This rather surprising turn represented Ruf's attempt to identify a least common denominator for reconciliation that could strengthen unity among the confederates – a unity that, for him too, was (and should remain) rooted in a divine plan. To this end, Ruf put less emphasis on covenant theology in the spirit of Bullinger, emphasizing instead the way that the Confederation's unity ought to reflect the essential unity of God himself. The speech of the herald in the *Etter Heini* sought to prove this point: the number one was indivisible (*unteilbar*) as was God, one in himself. This unity of God appeared to be mirrored in the history of salvation, especially through the election of “one small people,” a term that evoked the community among the Swiss:

zal eins ist eins wirt nit zertrennt /
 in dem man warlich gott erckennt /

der einig ist in sinem wäsen /
hatt im ein völkli vserläsen.

(The number one is one and won't be divided.
In it one truly recognizes God,
Who is One in his essence,
And has chosen for himself one small people.)

Contrary to what one might expect, however, the expression *völkli* in this passage introduced neither the chosen people of Israel nor the Swiss Confederates, but took a new turn. Obviously, Ruf did not simply want to enhance the myth; indeed, it appears that by this point, he counted it as common knowledge. Much more important to him as a precondition for unity was a modest way of life that would be pleasing to God. The first Swiss character to appear on the stage was therefore described as “schlechtlich bkleidt im grawen bart” (“modestly dressed with a gray beard”), embodying the ideal of the forefathers discussed above. Only after his entry did Ruf’s drama explicitly mention the political entity that concerned him: the Confederation as a whole.

* * *

Bullinger’s harsh *prosopopeia Dei* was legitimized by the concept of a covenant that provided the mythic cornerstone for the Confederation and its fortunate history of resistance. At its heart lay a myth of election, which was itself rooted in the archetype of Jewish election and the liberation of the people of Israel. Even the cows in their meadows that Bullinger praised signaled what was at stake: the salvation history of the Confederation, and power over the homeland of the Confederates. The Alpine homeland and its denizens embodied Bullinger’s argument, since they formed part of the Alpine ethnoscape that it was his goal to celebrate. His *Anklag*, a speech made by God to a people in the midst of political and ideological turmoil, thus captured a key moment in the self-reflection of the Swiss Confederation during the period 1450–1550.

Ruf’s plays also showed the Confederation in a critical situation of trial. However, the notions of election established by Zurich’s reformers now seemed more of a hindrance than a help to in overcoming the dangers that threatened Swiss unity. In order to remove the blinders from the eyes of his contemporaries, Ruf found ways to enact and thereby reconceptualize the Confederation’s mythic self-understanding. Whereas Bullinger enhanced an agonal past in order to legitimate the Reformation – in historical fact, a development that nearly shattered

the Confederation – , Ruf reminded its members that the precondition for peace was their unity as Christians. Ruf's reading therefore served as a criticism of the foundational character and function of the Swiss founding myths. Myths have the power to mobilize a citizenry, but they can also paralyze, an ambivalence that Ruf must have felt not only as a playwright and a rhetorical re-inventor of the dramatic herald, but no less as an immigrant from Constance who never lost sight of his own status as an outsider.

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