CHAPTER ONE

LIBRARIES IN 16TH-CENTURY ZÜRICH

During the medieval period there were only a few clerics in Zürich who possessed larger collections of books, such as Petrus Numagen (ca. 1450–1515) and Johannes Mantz (d. 1518), who held 58 and 47 titles respectively, or Felix Haemmerli (1389–1458/59) who perhaps owned as many as 500. The latter was probably the most extensive library in the whole diocese of Constance. Most libraries belonged to churches and cloisters. After the abolition of the cloisters on December 3rd 1524, a lot of Roman catholic books were destroyed, in particular, liturgical texts. The new libraries were not connected to cloisters, but to schools, like the Latin schools at the Fraumünster and the Grossmünster. In 1532 the reformer Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) reorganized the library of the Grossmünster, where Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) in 1525 had founded the so-called Schola Tigurina, the first Reformed-Protestant theological college for the education and training of a new generation of pastors. From 1532 to 1551 the Old Testament professor Conrad Pellikan (1478–1556) served as librarian and started maintaining a handwritten catalogue. During these two decades the library grew from 473 to 771 titles. Pellikan’s successor, Ludwig Lavater (1527–1586), continued the catalogue until 1595. By then, the library possessed 919 volumes. All the professors and students of the Schola Tigurina were using this library, among them Conrad Gessner, who had been teaching natural history and ethics since 1541. There are a number of books which were in that library and contain handwritten annotations by Gessner. Yet all the above-mentioned collections were not enough to satisfy the

1 58 titles were discovered from the private library of Numagen and 47 from Mantz in the ZBZ; they are still extant. Both men however, probably possessed twice as many books.
4 The catalogue still exists, ZBZ: Ms Car XII 4.
5 ZBZ: Ms Car XII 5.
intellectual needs of the scholars. Some of them bought a considerable number of books and amassed their own libraries. We have found 171 titles from Huldrych Zwingli’s private library,2 220 (from a probable 800) from his successor Heinrich Bullinger’s,6 369 from Bullinger’s pupil Rudolf Gwalther,8 and 395 from Conrad Gessner’s.

Book prices

Compared with the number of books in modern libraries or even in libraries of the 18th century, these were very small collections. However when we consider book prices in the 16th century and the wages of contemporary scholars, it becomes clear that they spent quite a lot of money on books. Their financial resources did not allow them to buy many more books. Zwingli and Bullinger, for example, as the leaders of the Zürich church earned about 700 pounds a year, but Conrad Clauser, as a pastor in the countryside, received only 72 pounds plus natural produce. The works of the church father Augustine in ten volumes (Basle 1528/29) cost 46 pounds, the famous anatomical work of Andreas Vesalius “De humani corporis fabrica” (Basle 1543) 10 pounds, and even a Zürich Bible of 1531, 7 pounds.9 The same applies to Conrad Gessner: even his little Latin New Testament (Basle 1523) cost 1 pound, “De raptu Proserpinae” by Claudian 12 Batzen (i.e. 1,5 pounds), and the “De natura stirpium libri tres” written by the physician and botanist Jean Ruel costed 24 Batzen.

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7 Leu and Weidmann (see footnote 1) described 217 titles. Meanwhile were discovered three titles more from Bullinger’s library: one in the University Library of Amsterdam (Huldrych Zwingli. Christianae fidei expositio, Zürich 1536), the Kantonsbibliothek Chur in Switzerland (Engelbert von Admont. De ortu et fine Romani imperii liber, Basel 1553) and the catholic library of the district in Oradea in Hungary (Cyprian. Opera, Basel 1521). Concerning Chur, see: Christoph Jörg. Bücher in der Kantonsbibliothek Graubünden aus dem Besitz namhafter Persönlichkeiten des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts. “Bündner, Monatsblatt” 1/2006 5–7.