

A NOTE ON THE THIRD COPY OF THE OLD LATVIAN LUTHERAN CATECHISM OF 1586

Pietro U. Dini

Pisa University

Abstract. The purpose of this article is to announce the existence of a third copy of Rivius's Old Latvian Catechism (1586), now preserved in Berlin in the Secret State Archive of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation.

Keywords: Old Latvian philology; 1586 Catechism; Johann Rivius.

As is known, D. Martin Luther's Enchiridion was translated into all three Baltic languages known to us today only a few decades after its publication in the 16th century, namely into Old Prussian by Abel Will in 1561, into Lithuanian by Baltramiejus Vilentas (Willent) in 1579 and into Latvian in 1586. As translator and editor of the first Latvian Lutheran Catechism, is listed Johannes Rivius, a pastor from Dobeles (Germ. Doblen) in Courland. After his death, the catechism was published by a college of pastors from Courland and Semigallia.

Regarding the relationship between Rivius and the catechism of 1586 named after him, we today know – very synthetically expressed – that Rivius was only a sort of 'cover name'. Rivius himself merely edited and supplemented old manuscripts already in circulation and then had them reprinted in compilation (cf. Straubergs 1935; Vanags 1998, 2000, 2009).

After the original printing in 1586, this text appeared again in 1615 with the insertion of an additional eight pages; a facsimile edition of the edition of 1615 was later published by Biezais (1959).

According to the *Seniespiedumi latviešu valodā* ('Old Latvian printings'; SLV 1999: 40), today only two copies of Rivius's catechism are accounted for and a third copy today is considered lost. Also, Vanags (2009: 288) gives the same information about two copies extant in Riga and in Tartu: "Sie wird in der Lettischen Nationalbibliothek in Riga und in der Universitätsbibliothek in Dorpat/Tartu aufbewahrt".

In fact, the copy of Rivius's catechism now preserved in the Latvian National Library in Riga (signature: L2S 129) belonged to Georg Heinrich Ferdinand Nesselmann (1811–1881). After his death, it was bought by the antiquarian E. Heinrich in 1881 and finally came into possession of the Latvian National Library in 1882.

The other copy of Rivius's catechism is today kept in the University of Tartu Library (signature: R III. V. 1.). This copy is in bad condition, with many pages in which the lower exterior angles are broken; in certain cases, the lacking text has been rewritten by hand.

Rivius's catechism was published for the first time by Adalbert Bezzenberger (1851–1922) in his *Litauische und lettische Drucke des 16. Jahrhunderts* (1875). A more recent modern edition appeared only about a century and a half later, thanks to a series of three papers in Japanese entitled *Prolegomena to the Study of Lutheran Small Catechism in Baltic Translations: Text in Old Latvian (1586)* by Inoue (1998–1999abc). The author's main aim in these and other studies (Inoue 2001, 2002) is to present a revision of Bezzenberger's (1875) edition based on a comparison with the facsimile edition of the catechism which was published in Riga (Rivius 1924).

Bezzenberger (1875) used a copy which was preserved in the Royal University Library in Königsberg. On page v, he wrote: "Er findet sich, mit den undeutschen Psalmen, Evangelien und Episteln von 1587 zu einem Bande vereinigt, in der Königl. Univ.-Bibl. Zu Königsberg (Cb. 178. 4°)". The same text published by Bezzenberger in 1875 was reprinted on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the Riga City Library (Rivius 1924). On page 4 of the edition of 1924, one can read the following interesting note:

Rīgas pilsētas bibliotēkas eksemplārā trūkstošie priekšvārdi — 8 lappuses, un beigās trūkstošās 3 lappuses, kā arī dažu sabojātu rindiņu papildinājumi atdarināti pēc Ķensbergas Universitātes Bibliotēkas eksemplāra

That is: “The 8 pages of preface lacking in the copy of the Riga City Library, and the three pages lacking at the end, as well as the completions of different lost lines have been done according to the copy of the Königsberg University Library”.

This means that at that time – i.e., in 1924 – the copy of the Königsberg University Library was still known and available to the editors. The already quoted *Seniespiedumi latviešu valodā* (ibid.) also mentions a third copy of the Rivius’s catechism, and precisely states that “1938 viens eks. bija Kēnigsbergas Pils. b-kā” (i.e., “in 1938 a copy was at the City Library of Königsberg”). As a matter of fact, no further mention of a third copy of Rivius’s catechism is found after the year 1938. In his works, Inoue did not mention a third copy of Rivius’s catechism. Evidently, the Königsberg copy went lost during World War II.

I can now happily announce that the third copy of Rivius’s catechism does still exist today and is preserved in the Secret State Archive of Prussian Heritage Culture Foundation (*Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz*) in Berlin-Dahlem, as I had the opportunity to verify during my last stay in Berlin-Dahlem.

The third copy of Rivius’s catechism is bound in one volume together with the *Undeutsche Psalmen* and the *Evangelien und Episteln* (1587). The accession stamp: “BIBLIOTHECA REGIOMONTANA” shows clearly that this is the copy which was kept in Königsberg and was published by Bezzenberger in 1875. The old signature was: *Cb. 178. 4°*, and the new one is: *60, 18*. The copy is freely available to readers (see Figures 1 and 2).

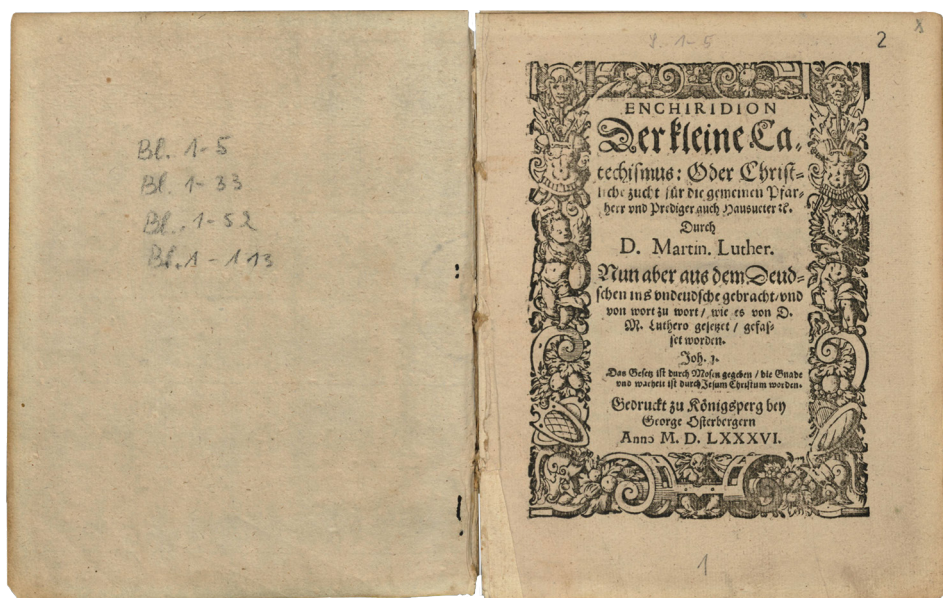


Figure 1. Title page, Rivius 1586, page 2.

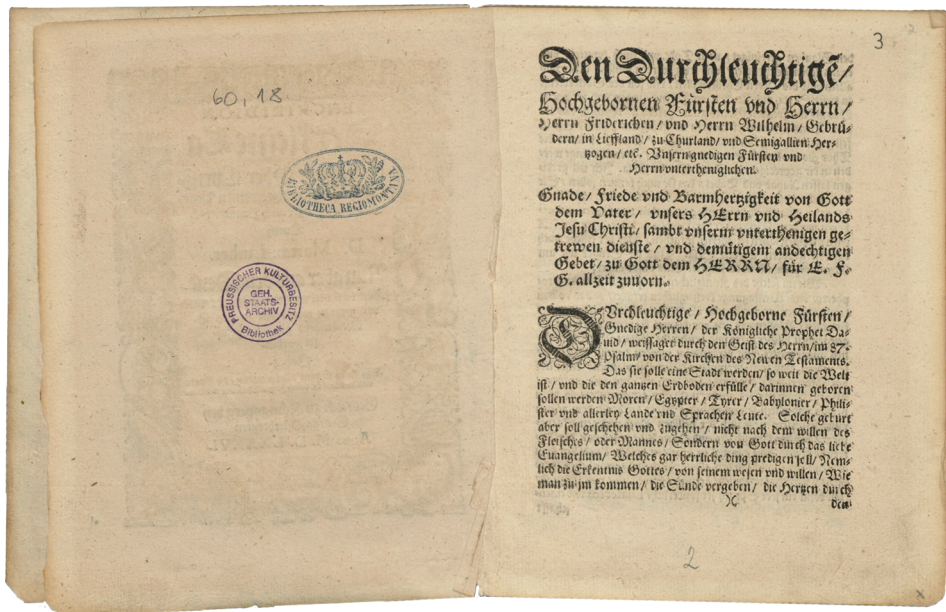


Figure 2. Accession stamps, Rivius 1586, page 3.

During the final days of the war, the volume was brought from Königsberg to Göttingen, with other manuscripts and early prints, at the initiative of Dr. Stefan Hans Götz von Selle (1893–1956), the deputy director of the Königsberg State and University Library. Initially it was looked after by the rectorate of the Georg August University in Göttingen. In 1953, the volume was stored in the newly founded Goslar archive, later to become the Göttingen archive. When the archive was taken over by the Secret State Archives in 1978, the volume was placed in the archive holdings in the 20th main Department. Since 2015, it has been part of the library holdings of the Secret State Archive of the Prussian Heritage Culture in Berlin-Dahlem (I thank Dr. Gudrun Hoinkis for private communication).

Summing up, we today have three copies of Rivius's catechism of 1586: **R**, preserved in the National Library of Latvia in Riga; **T**, preserved in the University of Tartu Library; **B**, preserved in the Secret State Archive of the Prussian Heritage Culture in Berlin-Dahlem.

Sources

Rivius, Johann. 1586. ENCHIRIDION | Der kleine Ca = | techismus: Oder Christ = | liche zucht für die gemeinen Pfar = | herr vnd Prediger auch Hausueter etc. | Durch | D. Martin. Luther. | Nun aber aus dem Deud = | fchen ins vndeud/che gebracht / vnd von | wort zu wort / wie es von D. | m. Luthero gefetzet / gefaf = | fet worden. | Gedruckt zu Königsperg bey George Osterbergern | Anno m.D. LXXXVI. ||

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Pietro U. Dini
Dipartimento di Filologia, letteratura e linguistica
Università di Pisa
Via S. Maria 36, Pisa
I – 56126, Italy
pietro.dini@unipi.it

KOPSAVILKUMS

PIEZĪME PAR 1586. GADA LATVIEŠU LUTERĀŅU KATEHISMA TREŠO EKSEMPLĀRU

Pietro U. Dini

Šī raksta mērķis ir informēt par t. s. Johana Rīvija latviešu luterāņu katehisma „ENCHIRIDION Der kleine Catechismus“ (1586) trešā eksemplāra esamību, kas pirms Otrā pasaules kara atradās Kēnigsbergas Universitātes bibliotēkā. Kara beigu posmā grāmata līdz ar citiem bibliotēkas krājumiem tika pārvesta uz Getingeni, pēc tam uz Goslāru, bet 1978. gadā nonāca Berlīnē. Tagad grāmata glabājas Berlīnē Prūsijas kultūras mantojuma fonda Slepējā valsts arhīvā un ir pieejama lasītājiem.

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