

*Jakob Ruf: Leben, Werk und Studien*, hg. von Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, 5 Bde., Zürich: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2008, 319, 779, 707, 1019, 723 S. & 2 CD-ROM – ISBN 978-3-03823-415-9.

Definitive, scholarly editions of medieval and early-modern authors are often, »like your father's sedan,« dull and reliable, but useful. This set, however, is something quite different. The product of more than five years of work by a team of researchers at the University of Zürich directed by the indefatigable Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, this edition breaks the mold of the sometimes tradition-bound genre and manages to set a new »twenty-first-century« standard for such projects. Publication of this enormous edition – the complete set of five volumes now totals more than 3500 pages – was originally begun in 2006, when Chronos Verlag printed the first volume. That book was intended to elaborate upon themes treated in an exhibit at Zürich about the life and times of the city's sixteenth-century surgeon, Jakob Ruf, as well as to serve as a general introduction to the larger project of a definitive edition of his works. Shortly after publication of that book, Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung acquired the rights to publish the entire collection. They have now produced a luxuriously bound, boxed set of five volumes beautifully printed on heavy paper. In this set the first volume has been newly titled and has been reworked to include larger, more sharply reproduced illustrations. The collection now includes a thorough index, extensive bibliographies and supporting documentation, two volumes of scholarly commentary, and two CD-ROM's, one of which includes digitized copies of the edition's illustrations and the other sound recordings of some of Ruf's works performed using sixteenth-century pronunciation. Both these last, unusual additions will make attractive teaching tools.

For anyone with an interest in the history of sixteenth-century Swiss society, this work is a treasure trove and a review can perhaps only scratch the surface of the riches here on offer. The first volume presents a compelling picture of the life of Ruf, a native of nearby Konstanz who rose from humble beginnings to become city surgeon in Zürich. The largest section of the volume is subtitled a »Biography in Nine Chapters,« and treats Ruf's familial origins,

early life, professional training, and his medical and literary careers at Zürich. In Zürich Ruf eventually became a trusted friend to many in the city's elite, although his status was always subordinate to the town's university-educated physician, Conrad Gessner. Contributions here concentrate on the surgeon's famous *Trostbüchlein*, a much republished and translated textbook for doctors and midwives, as well as his efforts as a prognosticator treating portents, and his work as a dramatist. All the pieces in this volume are authored or co-authored by Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, Andrea Kauer, Hubert Steinke, Stefan Schöbi and Seline Schellenberg Wessendorf.

These chapters do an excellent job, not only of narrating what can be discerned about Ruf's biography, but also of relating that material to broader trends and events in his time. In the sixteenth-century German-speaking world, as Hubert Steinke shows, the office of surgeon was usually free from guild control and thus considered a »free art« (*fryge Kunst*). In his piece, »Medizinische Karriere im städtischen Dienst,« (»A Medicinal Career in City Service«), Steinke shows how Ruf's rising social capital at Zürich constantly resulted in new duties. Still Ruf remained *kleinbürgerlich*, when compared against Zürich's Gessner, since a surgeon worked with his hands, while the office of a physician was a cerebral occupation that consisted primarily of astrological charting and the identification of humoral imbalances through the visual examination of bodily fluids. Despite the distinctly inferior status accorded surgeons, Ruf came to be a trusted member of the town's administration. One sign of the faith Zürich's town council placed in Ruf was its eventual decision to allow him to serve as »acting« city physician during those periods when Conrad Gessner was away from town. Another hint of the high regard in which Ruf came to be held during the generation he practiced in Zürich was the city's acquiescence in his request to reduce his duties because of overwork. Beyond such attention to the intimate day-to-day details of Ruf's professional life in Zürich we also learn in a fascinating chapter from Andrea Kauer and Seline Schellenberg Wessendorf, of Ruf's support for his hometown Konstanz during the Schmalkaldic War of 1546–1547. As this brief snapshot suggests, Ruf was always something of an extraordinary. The result of

the scrupulous attention to his life, as well as the view the text provides on the religious and political events that were occurring in the world outside Zürich's walls, is that Ruf becomes a lens for viewing both the normative and unusual possibilities on offer in the sixteenth century.

The remainder of the first volume includes a glossary of important sixteenth-century terms, people, and concepts titled »*Dreihundertsechzig Grad.*« Here the manner of presentation recalls the Zürich exhibit for which this book was originally intended to serve as a supplemental volume. Keyword headings are explained in short essays that are also richly illustrated. These entries treat, not only the famous religious reformers of the era, Heinrich Bullinger and Huldrych Zwingli, and other famous locals but also such seemingly arcane subjects as the *Züricher Ehelöffel* (»Züricher marriage spoon«), a mysterious object to which prospective candidates for divorce were chained to encourage reconciliation in the days before their final separation. Interesting contributions here, all written by Keller and members of her team, examine the customs of sixteenth-century heraldry, the contemporary belief in monsters, as well as the rituals surrounding drinking. Carefully selected, these entries serve to enhance the peculiarities of Ruf's own understanding of anatomy, society, and religious belief.

The three volumes that follow present annotated versions of Ruf's printed and manuscript works. Each text is accompanied by an exhaustive introduction that examines the work's roots and sources in sixteenth-century intellectual or cultural concerns, and, if a printed work, the history of its editions and the modern provenance of surviving editions in European and American libraries. Keller has opted to arrange these texts in strict chronological order, rather than divide the Latin texts from the German, or group Ruf's medical works aside from his plays and printed ephemera. Some will surely quibble with this decision, precisely because the conventions and questions of those trained in different disciplines are often quite distinct from one another. Certainly, the decision to adopt the chronological approach may privilege study of Ruf's oeuvre as a literary artifact. The strict chronological approach, for instance, provides for easy examination of changes in grammar, literary structures, topics, and language. Yet the author's total lit-

erary output was not so large as to make consulting texts of similar genres in each of three volumes onerous. Keller's choice, although it may be vexing to some, seems one perfectly logical way to arrange the data; another editor may have opted for another organizational scheme on grounds equally defensible.

The most famous of the texts reproduced here is Ruf's *Trostbüchlein*, a work long familiar to historians of medicine as a gynecological milestone. As part of his duties as city surgeon, Ruf was charged with examining and supervising Zürich's midwives, and thus his book was intended to serve as a textbook for prospective practitioners. Yet schooling young women in the trade seems to have been only a part of the surgeon's aims in publishing this work, since the book first appeared in 1554 in simultaneous Latin and German editions. Through the Latin edition, *De conceptu et generatione hominis*, Ruf staked his claim to being a man of learning. The supporting material that Keller provides for this text is exhaustive and in sum, the entire section treating the *Trostbüchlein* runs to more than 500 pages, the greatest space accorded to any work in the collection. This is certainly fitting given the enormous impact the book had throughout Europe. Keller reproduces the Latin and German text on opposing pages as well as a number of archival documents that demonstrate the book's wide reception in both Latin and German forms. Ultimately translated into Dutch, English, and Czech (the text of which is reproduced and translated into modern German here!), the book came to play a vital role throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, helping to separate the chaff of spurious legends and demonic lore about childbirth from the standards of gynecological knowledge accepted by many professionals at the time.

Ruf's two other medical treatises, an illustrated manuscript of 1545 on eye surgery, *Practica in arte ophthalmica copiosa*, and his 1556 printed edition of the *Tumorbüchlein*, a guide to the treatment of swellings and growths and the surgical removal of tumors, round out the presentation of Ruf's work as a theoretical and practicing surgeon. But still other works in these volumes will be of interest to social and medical historians as well, since the practica, calendars, prognostications, and Ruf's readings of several portents that the edition presents aptly display the astrological, divinatory,

and natural philosophical concerns in which sixteenth-century medical practitioners frequently engaged. In particular, those with an interest in natural philosophy and the history of science may find Ruf's three surviving texts interpreting recent portents fascinating reading. Throughout Europe at the time the reading of signs was often entrusted to medical professionals like Ruf. The knowledge that these figures possessed, not only of the natural philosophical corpus, but also of the history surrounding similar ominous events in the past, was seen as an indispensable tool for divining the meanings of recent portents. Yet just as Ruf tried to make readers of his *Trostbüchlein* aware of the natural forces that might produce deformed births, he also proved to be a rather sober and cautious reader of nature's signs. In his treatment of the birth of conjoined female twins born at Schaffhausen in 1543 (vol. 2, 415–429), Ruf insisted that purely natural forces might deform the foetus within a mother's womb and produce an abnormality »against the entirely usual processes of nature« (*etiam citra vulgarem naturae cursum*, p. 424). Although the surgeon insisted, like most learned commentators, that such events occurred within God's Providence and were intended to stir repentance, the space that he devoted to outlining the astrological conjunctions of houses as the ultimate cause for the malformation of the children's bodies favored his own understanding of natural processes over religious causes. Thus he ventured no moral or prediction for the future in concluding his consideration of the Schaffhausen births, except to counsel his readers that states and communities should show great care in appointing reliable doctors and midwives, so that delivering mothers were adequately supported and protected from the terrors that surrounded monstrous birth. Thus this interpretation reveals Ruf as the ever consummate, medical professional.

Beyond the medical dimensions of his career at Zürich, Ruf involved himself in the city's civic theater, both as a playwright and a director. Like many productions in similar venues throughout the continent at the time, the performances of Zürich's *Stadttheater* involved hundreds of residents in performances and pageants that might last several days. Jakob Ruf turned to writing plays for these performances after he had already established a considerable professional reputation as a medical practitioner in Zürich, his first

play being *Etter Heini* of 1538. That work was both a polemic against Catholicism and an attack on the widespread custom of *Reislauf*, that is, the wandering off of young Swiss men to serve in foreign armies. Ruf's subsequent dramas most often treated biblical themes in ways designed to stir civic patriotism and to celebrate the city's Protestant orthodoxy. Although he was neither as prolific nor polished as the most accomplished German-speaking dramatists of the age, his last and greatest work for the stage, *Adam und Eva* (1550) reveals a touching Protestant treatment of the moral and spiritual values of marriage set within a gentle lyrical verse.

The fifth volume of this set presents commentaries on various aspects of Ruf's literary, medical, and dramatic career. Here three chapters by Seline Schellenberg Wessendorf, Stefan Schöbi, and Andrea Kauer, focus on technical issues of the textual transmission of plays in Ruf's time, the performance practices and functions of the Zürich theater, and the overarching theme of the pious father in the author's opus. These studies, as others in the same volume that treat the surgeon's medical career and literary endeavors generally, manage to illuminate the texts, without dampening the desire for self study.

In sum, then, this attractive edition should appeal to any scholar with an interest in early-modern German literature, medicine, religion, or society. As Keller and her endlessly energetic team of researchers have here demonstrated, Jakob Ruf's life came to intersect with many of the most important issues, dilemmas, and problems of the age. One need not be a Ruf specialist to find these texts, or the secondary studies that are reproduced here, fascinating. This edition sets a standard that will be very hard for future editors of similar works to match, even as it demonstrates a quite fruitful synergy between modern technology and traditional philological and codicological concerns. Finally, a large word of praise is due the publisher, Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, who have not only produced a set of handsome and enduring volumes, but have done so at an attractive price that is not beyond the reach of poor academics.

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